

REVELATION 18:1-24

Chapters 17 to 19 record the ultimate victory of our Lord Jesus Christ. While these chapters do not chronologically advance the events in Revelation, they add details. Chapter 17 focuses on the religious system that God identified with Babylon in Scripture. Chapter 18 is on the commercial system.

There are several preliminary points to note in Chapter 18.

- First, the destruction of Babylon described in Chapter 18 is similar to the predicted destruction of Tyre in Ezekiel's day (Ezek. 26-28). Both cities are called harlots and known as great commercial and shipping centres, and they exert an ungodly influence upon the surrounding nations. At their destruction, merchants who benefited from commercial contact with the city were grieved.

Both cities – Tyre and Babylon – have a common link in that they are associated with Satan (see Isa. 14:4, 12; Ezek. 28:2, 13-14; Revelation 13:2).

- Second, in Chapter 18, the Bible tells us another system, represented by Babylon, will have control over humanity. The great whore who sits on many waters (17:1) is identified as Babylon the Great (17:5) and that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth (17:18). The angel describes her relationship to the Beast with seven heads and ten horns. She sits on the beast, and then later, she will be destroyed by the beast.
- Third, Chapters 17 and 18 are linked in the sense that the great harlot is not separated from Babylon. There is a single Babylon in view (see 17:18). In Chapter 18, there are many references to Babylon's commercial activity. The continuity of the two chapters is also further seen in the names, nature, and outcome of Babylon used in Chapters 17 and 18.

	Chapter 17	Chapter 18
Babylon's designation	17:5, 18	18:2, 10
Babylon's description	17:4	18:6, 16
Babylon's deeds	17:2, 6	18:3, 24
Babylon's destruction	17:16, 17	18:5, 8

So, chapters 17 and 18 represent two systems that share the common name of Babylon. Chapter 17 is a religious system that operates in opposition to the true God. Chapter 18 it is an economic system that does the same.

REVELATION 18:1-3

¹ And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.

² And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, And is become the habitation of devils, And the hold of every foul spirit, And a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

³ For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, And the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, And the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. (Revelation 18:1–3)

A. And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. (Revelation 18:1)

The phrase – after these things, which appears several times in Revelation – points not to chronological time but to a change from one vision to another.

“Another angel” is described as having great power and shining in glory. This is probably means that he comes from the presence of God, and he reflects the glory of God.

B. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, And is become the habitation of devils, And the hold of every foul spirit, And a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. (Revelation 18:2)

In verse 2, the angel cried with a mighty voice, denoting that he is speaking with great authority. His announcement is the same as the angel mentioned in 14:8.

Revelation 18:2	Revelation 14:8
And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.	And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

The word order is reversed in the Greek to emphasis her fall: It is fallen, it is fallen, Babylon the great. The repetition of the word "fallen" probably indicates that the judgment is assured. The past tense of the verb is given as if the actual destruction of Babylon had already taken place denoting not merely the expectation but also the certainty of this event.

Although there are similarities between the announcements in 14:8 and 18:2, there are also differences between the announcements. In 18:1, John describes the dwelling place of Babylon by referring to it three times as a prison, which he elaborates later in the chapter.

- the habitation of devils
- the hold of every foul spirit (cf. Isa. 13:21-22; 34:11-17; Jer. 51:37),
- the cage of every unclean and hateful bird (cf. Isa. 34:11, 13; Jer. 50:39).
[Some translations have it as “beasts” instead of “birds.”]

This Babylon would be the prison of every unclean spirit and every unclean bird, suggesting that it is the place where these creatures are consigned.

C. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. (Revelation 18:3)

This verse is very similar to 17:2. In chapter 17, the nations were drunk with the wine of the great whore and rebelled against God. In Chapter 18, the nations were also drunk with the material success afforded them by the great whore, and they too rebelled against God. The great whore has caused the nations to act immorally and in rebellion against God.

Here, John lists three categories: nations, kings and merchants. Whether it is syncretism (the worships of false gods) in Chapter 17 or materialism (the worship of mammon) in Chapter 18, the goal is the same – to be independent of God.

Babylon then is not only a centre for false worship, but it is also a centre for commerce and trade, and thus exercises great power over the world. While kings wield political power, merchants wield great financial power. When the wealth is destroyed, the merchants will lament (see Ezek. 27:32-34).

REVELATION 18:4-8

⁴ And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, That ye be not partakers of her sins, And that ye receive not of her plagues.

⁵ For her sins have reached unto heaven, And God hath remembered her iniquities.

⁶ Reward her even as she rewarded you, And double unto her double according to her works: In the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.

⁷ How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, So much torment and sorrow give her: For she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, And am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

⁸ Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, Death, and mourning, and famine; And she shall be utterly burned with fire: For strong *is* the Lord God who judgeth her. (Revelation 18:4–8)

A. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. (Revelation 18:4)

In this section, believers are called to Babylon. Another voice from heaven instructed God's people to separate from the system that the city symbolizes so they would avoid getting caught in her judgment.

The angel calls on God's people to leave and to forsake the enticements of the idolatry, self-sufficiency, love of luxury, and violence that the city symbolizes. The

angel is not calling on believers to leave the Roman world or Rome itself. Instead, they were to break with Rome's idolatrous culture and lifestyle and to avoid compromise.

B. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. (Revelation 18:5)

The angel gives another reason for leaving Babylon. God is about to judge the city because of the sins of the people. In a sense, the city has worn out God's patience. Her sins have reached heaven, indicating that the sins reach a point where God, by virtue of His righteous character, has to take action against the wickedness of men.

God has remembered her iniquities. It does not mean that God has forgotten and now he remembers, but that God now considers their sin and the need to respond in righteous judgment.

C. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double. (Revelation 18:6)

The angel calls on God to exact judgment upon Babylon to the fullest. The phrase – double unto her double – means to pay back fully (see 18:7; Exod. 22:4, 7, 9; Isa. 40:2; 61:7; Jer. 16:18; 17:18; Zech. 9:12). This is the law of retaliation (*lex talionis*).

In Jeremiah 50:21, Jeremiah called Babylon, "the land of Merathaim," which means "double bitterness." Here, it means that the exact measure should be given to her as she gave to others. What she dispensed to others will be dispensed to her. The cup is filled with the wine of God's fury, which has been stated already. God will never forget or condone sins. In His wrath, He will mete out the punishment sinners deserve.

D. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. (Revelation 18:7)

Because of her glory and opulence, Babylon "praised of the whole earth" (Jer. 51:41). The hanging gardens were known as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The city was the epitome of luxury.

"I sit as queen." Babylon spoke these words with pride. She boasted of her self-sufficiency. She wanted to occupy the throne of God and determine her own course. But she can never be like God and rule as queen of heaven. Her pride is so great that she believes herself to be immune from God's judgment. As in other places in Revelation, John here alludes to the Old Testament quoting from the prophets concerning the fall of Babylon (Isa. 47:7- 8; Ezek. 28:2; Zeph. 2:15).

However, her claims of superiority would be the very reason for her downfall. Babylon was eventually brought low and destroyed because it was filled with depravity and debauchery.

- E. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. (Revelation 18:8)

Babylon will be humbled. Her downfall is described in terms of death, mourning and famine. She boasted that she would never be a widow, yet death struck the people closest to her. She boasted she would not see sorrow, and yet she would experience the worst of sorrow. She boasted that she lives luxuriously, but she will suffer famine. She glorified herself, but she will be overwhelmed by plagues. Again, John alludes to the Old Testament (Isa. 47:9; see Jer. 50:31).

The time reference – one day – describes the suddenness and swiftness of Babylon’s downfall.

THE FALL OF BABYLON (REVELATION 18:9-20)

From verses 9-20, John records three laments and one praise.

- the lament of the kings (18:9-10)
- the lament of the merchants (18:11–17a)
- the lament of the sea captains and sailors (18:17b–19);
- the praise of the saints and apostles in heaven (18:20).

A. Lament of Kings (Revelation 18:9-10)

⁹ And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, When they shall see the smoke of her burning,

¹⁰ Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, Saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come. (Revelation 18:9–10)

1. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, (Revelation 18:9)

Kings will mourn when they see the collapse of the system that has sustained them and enabled them to live luxuriously. The lament of the kings is an echo of the actions and lament of the princes of Tyre over the destruction of their city (Ezek. 26:16-17).

These kings weep and lament over the down fall of Babylon because they realize the tremendous financial losses that have occurred as Babylon goes up in flames. The emphasis is not so much on Babylon being consumed by flames but on the fire itself, the suffering, and the painful consequences.

2. Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. (Revelation 18:10)

Standing afar off, the kings may have been able to escape the physical judgment for now, but when the monetary and commercial system collapses, physical distance will not shield the kings from economic and financial ruin. This ruin will take place swiftly and suddenly, in one hour.

B. Lament of Merchants (Revelation 18:11-17)

¹¹ And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; For no man buyeth their merchandise any more:

¹² The merchandise of gold, and silver, And precious stones, and of pearls, And fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, And all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, And all manner vessels of most precious wood, And of brass, and iron, and marble,

¹³ And cinnamon, and odours, And ointments, and frankincense, And wine, and oil, And fine flour, and wheat, And beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, And slaves, and souls of men.

¹⁴ And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, And all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, And thou shalt find them no more at all.

¹⁵ The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, Shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, Weeping and wailing,

¹⁶ And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, That was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, And decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!

¹⁷ For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, And sailors, and as many as trade by sea, Stood afar off, (Revelation 18:11–17)

1. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: (Revelation 18:11)

Here John alludes to Ezekiel's lament over Tyre (Ezek. 27:1-36). The prophet expresses the same grief and lament over Tyre as the kings of the earth do over Babylon.

The merchants see that their businesses have come to a complete halt. The people stopped buying. This economic collapse is a just retribution because these are the very people who deprive believers from selling and buying (Revelation 13:17).

Now they themselves are denied that right, and they realize that without buyers their business is doomed. The wailing of the merchants will be worse than that of kings because their losses are greater.

2. The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. (Revelation 18:12-13)

The array of goods was brought in from all over the world. Even at this time, international trade and commerce was flourishing. There is a list of over 28 products that are listed ranging from luxury goods to household items from dry goods to livestock, and even slaves.

Many of the items listed here are similar to the list recorded in Ezekiel 27:12-22 (although John did not follow the same sequence). John begins his list with luxury items.

- Gold was imported from Spain during the first century.
- Silver also originated in Spain and was used to embellish couches, cups, and plates.
- Precious stones generally came from India and were cut and polished in Alexandria.
- Pearls were gathered from the areas around the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean.
- Fine linen came from Alexandria.
- Purple was produced from a shellfish or from the root of a plant.
- Silk produced in China or India.
- Scarlet cloth was likewise an expensive item. Scarlet produced from the berry of the kermes oak was used to dye the cloth.
- Thyine wood, which is an aromatic wood taken from the citron tree found in North Africa.
- Ivory from the tusks of elephants.
- Precious wood included ebony, cedar, and cypress. These varieties are precious because they resisted decay and repelled insects.
- Brass (bronze), an alloy made of copper and tin, was produced in many countries. It was highly prized in the making of mirrors.
- Iron deposits came from Greece, Spain and were used to make weapons.
- Marble came from Phrygia, Greece, and parts of Africa. It decorated the homes of wealthy citizens.
- Cinnamon and spice and incense and myrrh and frankincense are the four classes of spices that aided the rich in dispelling unpleasant odours. These spices were obtained from many countries – cinnamon from east Africa, Arabia, and as far away as India.
- Spice as an aromatic substance also came from India.
- Incense was an element used for burning in pagan worship.

- Myrrh and frankincense were acquired from Somalia and south Arabia. All these spices were costly and considered worthy of being presented as gifts to royalty (Matt. 2:11).
- Wine, olive oil, fine wheat flour, and wheat are daily staples common in most households. Grapes were grown throughout the Middle East from Israel to Spain.
- Fine wheat flour and wheat came from Egypt, which served as the breadbasket for Rome.
- Cattle and sheep refer to various domesticated animals.
- Horses and carriages are used for riding and carrying burdens (Luke 10:34; Acts 23:24).
- Slaves and souls of people. The word “slave” is always translated “body” except for this verse. Slaves were people captured in war or kidnapped at sea by pirates; some had sold themselves into slavery for economic reasons; and others were born into slavery or abandoned by their parents.

3. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. (Revelation 18:14)

The merchants will also lose their luxurious possessions. People will not be able to find the treasures. The Greek phrasing has a double negative; it reads as “thou shalt find them no more, never.” The implication is that the destruction will be permanent and irreversible.

4. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. (Revelation 18:15-17a)

The merchants wailed when they saw the destruction of the goods. They too, like the kings, stand at a distance viewing the destruction of the city (cf. 18:10, 15, 17). The also made the same pronouncement: “Alas, alas, that great city....”

Just as the kings wailed over the destruction of their power, the merchants wailed over the destruction of their wealth.

Revelation 17:4	Revelation 18:16
And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour,	And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet,
and decked with gold	and decked with gold,
and precious stones and pearls....	and precious stones, and pearls!

This is another indication that the woman and the great city are the same, which means that the wealth that is associated with the city vanish together.

C. Lament of Ship Captains (Revelation 18:17b-19)

¹⁷ And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, And sailors, and as many as trade by sea, Stood afar off,

¹⁸ And cried When they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What *city is* like unto this great city!

¹⁹ And they cast dust on their heads, And cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, Wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! For in one hour is she made desolate.

(Revelation 18:17–19)

The “shipmaster” refers to four groups of people.

- Shipmaster – ship-owner or the helmsman.
- All the company in ships – voyagers or travellers.
- Sailors who make up the crew of a ship.
- Trade by sea – people who make their living from the sea.

All these people look at the destruction of Babylon, and they, too, like the kings and merchants, begin to weep. The cry is similar to the one asked by those who witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 22:8; compare Ezek. 27:32).

D. Praise of Saints (18:20)

²⁰ Rejoice over her, *thou* heaven, And *ye* holy apostles and prophets; For God hath avenged you on her. (Revelation 18:20)

While unbelievers wailed, believers, on the other hand, rejoiced. The reason for this rejoicing is that God will avenge on their behalf. A literal reading of the last clause would be – “God has pronounced on her the judgment she wished to impose on you.” In other words, this is the law of retaliation (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Matt. 5:38). The wicked passed verdicts of punishment on God’s people, but now God has passed the same verdict on them (compare Jer. 51:49).

REVELATION 18:21-24

²¹ And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast *it* into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

²² And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; And no craftsman, of whatsoever craft *he be*, shall be found any more in thee; And the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;

²³ And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; And the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: For thy

merchants were the great men of the earth; For by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, And of all that were slain upon the earth. (Revelation 18:21–24)

- A. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. (Revelation 18:21)**

John describes the downfall of Babylon as a millstone being cast into the sea. Here, John again relies on the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 51:63-64). Here, a mighty angel (not a prophet) casts a large millstone (not a stone) into the sea (not Euphrates). By John's account, Babylon the great city will be picked up and cast into the sea to be seen no more. The destruction of the Babylonian economy and Babylon itself will be both swift and complete.

- B. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft *he be*, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee. (Revelation 18:22-23a)**

With the economy destroyed, social life in Babylon also ceased. John here describes several aspects:

- The most obvious social life is music-playing.
- The craftsmen are the skilled workers will also cease their work.
- The sound of the millstone will cease, meaning that the millstone grinding grain will cease, which means that the baking of bread will stop, and the daily staple of life become unavailable.
- The oil supply dries up, lamps no longer burn, and life is cast into darkness. Without the benefit of light, life will be hard.
- The joyful events of life – such as marriage – will also cease. There will be no more weddings, festivities, and other family celebrations.

- C. For thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth. (Revelation 18:23-24)**

The angel gives three reasons for this devastation.

- First, the Babylon men whom the world regards as great have enriched themselves and lifted themselves up in pride.

They worshipped money as their god, ignoring and rejecting God's laws. John had in mind Ezekiel's words to the merchants of Tyre (Ezek. 28:5, 9)

- Second, because they were great, they deceived the rest of the world. She deceived all the nations into thinking that joy, security, honour, and meaning in life come through the accumulation of material wealth.

The word “sorcery” denotes the practice of magic, which is an utter abomination to God (Deut. 18:10-12).

Sorcery and witchcraft are closely linked to prostitution and fornication. And here, John describes Babylon as a city filled with idolatry and immorality.

- Third, Babylon was responsible for the death of believers. The death of God's servants is caused by this system. Through her example, Babylon has been responsible for all the slayings on the earth

SUMMARY

The Babylon John described in this chapter is the commercial system of buying and selling goods to make a profit. As a religious system, Babylon is ecumenical and includes all religions. At the root of every system is the self – self-dependence, self-gratification, self-interest.