

Chapter summary – Even a superficial reading will turn up similarities between Revelation 17 and Revelation 18. Both chapters describe a woman who reigns like a queen, corrupts all who associate with her, and sheds the blood of the martyrs. Both chapters describe the judgment of this wicked woman.

More careful readers, however, also note the differences. Chapter 17 describes “Mystery Babylon”; chapter 18 depicts “that great city Babylon, that mighty city.” The woman in 17 is a harlot; the one in 18 is a habitation. The woman in 17 sits on seven hills; the one in 18 is situated on a seaport. The woman in 17 comes to an end at the hands of the beast, and none of her associates is sorry to see her demise. The woman in 18 is destroyed by a different agent, and all of her associates lament her fate. These differences indicate that Babylon in 18 is not the equivalent of Babylon in 17. Chapter 18 brings before us commercial, social, and economic Babylon; whereas chapter 17 treats of religious and ecumenical Babylon.

The Babylon whose fall is contemplated in Revelation 18 is identical to the Babylon whose fall is anticipated in Revelation 16:19. There it was imminent; here it is fulfilled. The question of whether great Babylon is a literal city to be rebuilt on the Euphrates River is the subject of friendly debate among Bible teachers. The Scofieldian view denies that a literal Babylon will reappear in history as a city in Mesopotamia. Ottman, Larkin, Walvoord, and others favor a literal Babylon. Others, like Barnhouse, hold to a symbolic meaning for Babylon and make it synonymous with the whole world system.

When men can marshal strong arguments for two opposite points of view, quite often a mediating view has merit. Perhaps we should understand that literal Babylon will return to the scene of the Euphrates and become the chief center of world commerce during the tribulation period. But in this conclusion we would be wise not to restrict commercial Babylon to the literal city alone, for commercialism will characterize all of the cities of the beast's empire.

Without a doubt, other ancient cities, like Tyre, will also be rebuilt and become associated with Babylon. At any rate, all that Babylon means and includes will come crashing down to final oblivion as a just recompense for her sins.¹

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IV. the vision of the Final Days, (Chs. 6-22)

E. THE BABYLONIAN JUDGMENT - (17:1-18:24)

**3. The mixed emotions over Babylon’s dissolution, (18:1-20)
- "THE GRANDDADDY OF ALL DEPRESSIONS"**

 **COMMENTARY:**

¹ Benson, *Revelation: The Grand Finale of History*, pp. 75, 76

 **INTERPRETATION:**

¹ **After** (the angel showed me), **these things** (pertaining to the fall of the one world religious organization), **I saw another angel coming down from heaven** (God's abode and presence), **having great authority** (one of God's higher ranking angels), **and the earth was illuminated with his glory**, (his splendor).²

The Demonization of Babylon

² **And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen** (its religion is judged and destroyed in Revelation 17 and), **is fallen** (its politics and economics is judged and destroyed in Revelation 18), **and** (following its complete destruction), **has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul** (fallen and demonic), **spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird** (also representing demons, [cp. Isa. 13:19-21; 34:11-15; Jer. Zeph. 2:13-15; 50:39; 51:37])!³

The Fornication of Babylon

³ **"For** (i.e., the reason for this destruction and incarceration is because), **all the nations** (the general populous of the world), **have drunk of** (participated in), **the wine** (the elements), **of the wrath** (God's divine judgment), **of her** (Babylon's), **fornication** (of her spiritual idolatry), **the kings of the earth** (the leaders of these nations), **have committed fornication with her, and the merchants** (the business men and women), **of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury,**" (the seemingly endless and lucrative economic opportunities she provides).

F **APPLICATION:**

This verse links spiritual adultery (idolatry) with "excessive luxuries." A focus on material things leads not only to self-indulgence, but also to an arrogance which denies any need for God. The worldly person

² Some say it is a literal angel who has extraordinary authority. Others believe that this angel is Christ. (Benson, *Revelation: The Grand Finale of History*, p. 76) Newell says that this is not Christ because He's not "another angel" and that "Christ Himself has all authority in heaven and on earth." (Newell, *The Book of the Revelation*, p. 285) Jesus Christ is not another anything!

³ The downfall of the city of Babylon in 18:2 is followed by its becoming the habitation of demons, the "hold" or "prison" of every evil spirit, and the "cage," the same word in the Greek as "hold" (phylake), of every unclean and hateful bird. The threefold description of the inhabitants of fallen Babylon is a reference to fallen angels in their various characteristics as demons and evil spirits, symbolized by the bird (cf. "birds," Isa. 34:11-15; Matt. 13:32). This abandonment of destroyed Babylon to demons is a divine judgment stemming from the utter wickedness of its inhabitants described in verse 3. (Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 259) In Revelation 20:1-7, we are told of Satan's apprehension and place of incarceration, "the bottomless pit," during the reign of Christ for a thousand years. It may be that God is telling us here in Revelation 18:2, of the apprehension and place of incarceration of Satan's followers during the millennial period.

puts his or her hope in possessions and in this sense puts things in the place rightly occupied by God. Idolatry is not just bowing down to images; it is also relying on wealth or power rather than on the Lord.⁴ (Idolatry is anything that takes the place of God or detracts us from Him.)

The Separation from Babylon

⁴ **And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of** (out from amidst), **her** (the Babylonian city or world system), **my people** (which may be those tribulation saints who are now saved and/or the elect of God who would be saved; who are in or are doing business with Babylon), **lest you share in her sins** (of self-indulgence, pride [v. 7] and rejection of the Most High God who sits on the throne of the universe, e.g.), **and lest you** (as well), **receive of her plagues** (suffer as well, the divine punishment that she will experience for her sins [cf., Gen. 19:12-14; Num. 16:23-26; Jer. 50:4-9; 51:6-9, 45; 2 Cor. 6:14-17; 1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Jn. 2:15]).

F APPLICATION:

We need to be careful of the company we keep. We will share not only fellowship with those we are friends with, but we will also share the blessings or plagues that the relationship brings.

The Transgression of Babylon

⁵ **“For her sins** (of grossly missing the mark of God’s standards), **have** (been so large and extensive, that they have), **reached to heaven, and God has remembered** (each of), **her iniquities**, (sinful acts and thoughts).

F APPLICATION:

God tells His people in Jeremiah 31:34b that, *“I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”* In Psalm 103:12 God tells His people, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”* *“If we confess our sins,”* God’s people are forgiven because *“He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9) Not only are believers forgiven by God, but they are preserved by Him as well.

“Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. “They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day

⁴ Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, Logos Library System.

which is coming shall burn them up,” says the Lord of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. (Malachi 3:16-4:2)

God does not forget the sin of unbelievers though. Thus He does not forgive and preserve them, but condemns and punishes them. We must confess and repent/separate ourselves from our sin if we are to avoid God’s just and eternal punishment of sin.

The Retribution of Babylon

⁶ “**Render** (calamity), **to her** (Babylon, God), **just as she rendered** (calamity), **to you** (and your people⁵—i.e., reward her accordingly, no mercy God, give Babylon what exactly what she deserves [cp., Ex. 32:33, 34; Jer. 32:17-19; Prov. 24:29; Mat. 16:27; Rom. 12:17-21; 2 Tim. 4:14]), **and repay her double** (a double measure of calamity), **according to her works** (practices); **in the cup which she has mixed** (her godless deeds), **mix double** (twice as much godly judgment), **for her**.⁶

The Self-glorification of Babylon

⁷ “**In the measure** (to the extent), **that she** (Babylon, in her pride), **glorified** (exalted, lifted up), **herself** (rather than You, God), **and lived luxuriously** (in excess, extravagance [*a by-product of pride*], ignoring the calamities of others), **in the same measure** (as her pride and extravagance), **give her torment⁷ and sorrow** (mourning); **for** (the reason being), **she says in her heart** (she boasts), **‘I sit as queen** (beautiful, exalted and supreme over all), **and am no widow** (i.e., wanton of anything or insecure), **and will not see sorrow,**’ (any misfortune or lack).

The Destruction of Babylon

⁸ “**Therefore** (in light of her imposed calamity upon others and her self-glorification), **her plagues** (calamity, judgment), **will come in one day** (within a 24 hour period, she will experience)—**death** (total destruction would come to the city), **and mourning** (would result over the destruction of the city), **and famine**, (would result in the lost resources of the city). **And she will be utterly** (completely), **burned with fire** (totally consumed in flames), **for strong is the Lord God who judges her** (not the devil who built her).

⁵ In Acts 9:4, 5 we see that when Saul was persecuting God’s children, he was persecuting God Himself. So it will be when Babylon brings calamity upon God’s children during the tribulation period.

⁶ The double punishment and the double reward come from the fact that frequently in Jewish law anyone responsible for loss or damage had to repay it twice over (Exodus 22:4, 7, 9). Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Revelation of John - Volume 2 Chapters 6-22 (Revised Edition)*, Logos Library System.

⁷ Torment here, “refers to trial by torture with its resultant mental anguish and grief.” (Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 261)

2) The earthly kings weep, (9, 10)

NOTES:

INTERPRETATION:

The Destruction of Babylon Continued

⁹ “**The kings** (political leaders), **of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep** (sob openly), **and lament** (means to beat upon one’s head or breast in morning),⁸ **for her** (Babylon, their capital city), **when they see the smoke of her burning** (when they witness the political capital and commercial center of the world, and thus their political careers go up in smoke),

¹⁰ “**standing at a distance for fear of her torment** (fearing if they tried to rescue her or even got to close to her, they too would suffer her fate), **saying, ‘Alas, alas,** (or Woe, woe), **that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For** (the reason being), **in one hour your judgment has come.’** (The Roman Prince’s empire that they believed in, devoted their political careers to, proclaimed would last forever, was not only totally decimated, but in only an hour! This will be unbelievable, unfathomable, incomprehensible to them!)

3) The earthly merchants weep, (11-14)

INTERPRETATION:

The Commercialization of Babylon

¹¹ “**And the merchants** (business leaders), **of the earth** (as well), **will weep and mourn over her, for** (the reason being), **no one buys their merchandise anymore**, (their base of operations is now ripped from under them and their stocks are going to plummet):

¹² “**merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble;**

¹³ “**and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men,** (i.e., male and female slaves).⁹

⁸ It is the same word used in Revelation 1:7 to describe how unbelievers will react when they see the return of the Lord Jesus Christ at the end of the tribulation period.

⁹ Is John suggesting that there will, in the end times, be a return to slavery? Perhaps not in the ancient sense, but certainly we can see an increasing loss of freedom in our world today. Persons are “bought and sold” (and even traded!) by athletic teams; and our great corporations more and more seek to control the lives of their officers and workers. As people become more enslaved to luxury, with more bills to pay, they find themselves unable to break loose from the “system.” (Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Logos Library System)

¹⁴ “**The fruit** (the harvest), **that your soul longed for** (longed to ultimately reap), **has gone from you** (slipped through your fingers), **and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you** (you have lost your fortunes and your merchandise both), **and you shall find them no more at all**, (they will not be made available again).

4) The earthly captains and sailors weep, (15-19)

INTERPRETATION:

The Lamentation over Babylon

¹⁵ “**The merchants of these** (luxurious), **things who became rich by** (their commerce with), **her** (Babylon), **will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing**,

¹⁶ “**and saying, ‘Alas, alas**, (Woe, woe), **that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls!**

¹⁷ “**For in one hour such great riches came to nothing** (disappeared). **Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade** (make their living), **on the sea, stood** (in astonishment and mourning), **at a** (safe), **distance**

¹⁸ “**and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’** (Without Babylon, we have nothing!? What is to become of us now!?)

¹⁹ “**They threw dust on their heads** (to show their grief), **and cried out** (as well), **weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas**, (Woe, woe), **that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by** (transporting), **her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’**

F APPLICATION:

What did all of those who wept over the fall of Babylon weep over? Selfish things. Selfishness was the entire focus of their mourning, (their careers, their profits, their luxuries, their dream of a humanly produced utopia)! But, does that not make sense? There are not many higher things an unbeliever could hope to acquire and maintain? The pleasure that these things will provide though, will always be temporary this side of heaven. Everything in this life will pass away sooner or latter. Permanent peace and contentment can only be found in accepting Christ as one’s Savior and by maintaining a growing relationship with Him. This no one can take away.

For a believer on this earth, his career is a servant of Christ; his luxuries are all spiritual blessings from heavenly places; and His utopia begins only after death.

5) The heavens rejoice, (20)

INTERPRETATION:

The Celebration over Babylon

²⁰ “**Rejoice** (not over the multitudes who have died in their sin and gone to hell, but), **over** (the ruin of), **her** (the organization that lead

them down that path, as well as martyred the saints), **O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets** (rejoice), **for God has avenged you on her!**” (for all of the ill treatment and even martyrdom you suffered).

F APPLICATION:

Vengeance is not wrong, but it is God’s to exercise. He knows not only the true facts about all situations, but He knows them all, (God doesn’t only have bits and pieces of information). He then can exercise vengeance with absolute justice. He also exercises vengeance in absolute control of His being. (Have you ever disciplined a child when you were out of control? What would we possibly do if we were taking vengeance upon someone!?)

What we sow we reap. God is not mocked. Neither does the ill treatment of His children go unnoticed. God is a jealous God and even though He tells us to love our enemies, He does not overlook what we suffer at their hands.

4. The obliteration of the Great City, Babylon, (18:21-24)

INTERPRETATION:

²¹ **Then** (after seeing the destruction of Babylon), **a mighty** (a strong and powerful), **angel took up a stone like a great millstone** (not one like a woman would use or even a man, but one that would require animals to turn), **and threw it into the** (Mediterranean), **sea** (the idea being that the queen’s neck [Babylon], is tied to the millstone), **saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore,** (it is obliterated from the face of the earth and will never rise again. All of its activity will cease in an instant).

²² **“The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.**

²³ **“The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For** (the reason being), **your merchants were the great men of the earth** (men whose support of Babylon helped to promote the Roman Prince’s policies of godless practices, global oppression, and merciless persecution), **for by** (or this judgment comes as well because of), **your sorcery** (your demonic illusions, deceptions and seductions), **all the nations were deceived,** (led into idolatry).

²⁴ **“And in her was found the** (reason and the means of the), **blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth,”** (as God accused and judged Cain for spilling the blood of his brother Able, so will God accuse and judge Babylon for spilling the blood of the children of God when their blood cries out to Him).

F APPLICATION:

Heaven rejoices when sinners come to repentance; it also rejoices when God avenges His people by judging their enemies. The righteousness of God requires that justice be done. Inequality, inhumanity, and indecency cannot continue indefinitely. The forces of good must triumph in order to vindicate God's character. God will have the last word and put to silence every rebel force.¹⁰

NOTES:

¹⁰ (Benson, *Revelation: The Grand Finale of History*, p. 79)