

## **“THE FALL OF BABYLON.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**October 11, 2015, 6:00PM**

**Scripture Texts: Revelation 18:1-24**

### **Introduction.**

In Revelation 17:16 John was given a brief glimpse of the judgment of Babylon.

**Revelation 17:16** And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire.

Now in Chapter 18 the full story is told and John sees the judgment in detail. Now Babylon is completely destroyed.

Since this is a long chapter and we are doing the whole chapter it might help to have some sense of the outline of the chapter which I have printed on the back of your bulletin.

Remember this is not the fall of a specific city such as Babylon or Rome or a place you can find on a map, but the fall of all godless worldly human systems under the influence of Satan. Babylon is the Bible's word for the world in opposition to God, either through persecution or seduction, through pain or pleasure.

Scripture presents us with the great conflict between the realm of Satan, his kingdom on earth, and the kingdom of God.

### **First, the prediction of Babylon's fall (vv. 1-3).**

Chapter 18 contains many allusions and references to Jeremiah 50-51 about the fall of Babylon and Ezekiel 27 about the fall of Tyre.

**Isaiah 21:9** “Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground.”

The voice is the voice of authority, coming down from heaven. Only this voice can overcome worldly power and influence we have seen displayed in these visions. So certain is the destruction it is spoken of in the past tense. What God declares is as good as done.

What a reversal. No one saw this coming, fallen is Babylon the Great. Everyone thought she was too great to fail, like those who think the US is too great to fail. But it turns out the greatness was a veneer, a false front, a façade that couldn't be maintained.

This Babylon will become as desolate as the original Babylon in the OT when it was destroyed. Not a hint of the original great city remained. She will be uninhabitable, only a haunt for all that is unclean.

**Jeremiah 51:37** Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant.

To reject God is to reject what is clean and holy and good. To reject God leaves you in the company of what is unclean, dark, evil, vile, worthless. She who promoted wickedness will become the habitation of all wickedness.

Then the reason for the judgment is given.

**Revelation 18:3** 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.

This is not just sexual immorality, but all spiritual idolatry which is spiritual adultery, everything that is opposed to God or is put over and above God. This is worship gone wrong, worship misplaced, worship turned into something mercenary or commercial, a business transaction. Certainly it includes sexual immorality as that is one of the primary means Satan uses to get us to commit spiritual adultery against God.

Drinking implies full participation, taking in, a willingness to commit idolatry in order to gain material and economic benefits and security. Worldly pleasures have an intoxicating influence and reduce ones resistance to all Babylon's influence.

**Second, an exhortation to God's people to separate from Babylon before judgment comes (vv. 4-8).**

Because Babylon's fall is certain, there is a great urgency to resist her and to separate from her in every way possible. Do not participate in her sins so you don't suffer her judgment.

**Isaiah 52:11** Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord.

I am reminded of the exhortation to Lot not even to cast a longing look back, but to flee. Beware of any compromise, Satan and his temptations are so subtle greater vigilance is necessary.

**II Corinthians 2:11** so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

We are the called out ones, we are the ones called to sojourn in a foreign land, in a land that is not our home. We are called out of the world, we are called to holiness. The world is a sinking ship, it is taking on water fast. Jump ship, get out.

Babylon's sins are filling up and now full. God has remember all her sins and she is about to pay in full for all her iniquity. In fact she will be paid back double. She will get all she deserves.

### **Third, the lament of those who cooperate with Babylon (vv. 9-19).**

Three groups especially loved Babylon and her destruction is cause for great lose and grief. This effects all levels of society, no one is immune, no matter how powerful or rich or important.

#### ***The kings [monarchs] of the earth [vv. 9-10].***

The kings of the earth have yielded to her seduction and benefited greatly. They threw off God and ruled ruthlessly and without regard to eternal consequences.

Notice what they wail for. Not for their sin, not for God's glory robbed, they wail for Babylon. They still think of her as great and mighty.

#### ***The merchants of the earth [vv. 11-17a].***

The kings enjoyed the immorality and sensual pleasures of Babylon, the merchants trafficked it, marketed it and exported it. They are the vast middle class. The merchants are the business people who live for the riches of this world and profit off their involvement in the world.

What a catalogue of luxuries. Precious jewels and stones; costly fabrics; special wood, ivory and metals; fragrant spices and ointments; and final animals, transportation and human slaves.

The merchant's job is to talk us into indulging ourselves, satisfying not just our needs but our wants and wishes. It's all about living for yourself and the things that bring pleasure in this life, about having your best life now.

Notice everything was for sale. Whatever someone is willing to sell their soul for, they are willing to sell.

Malls are America's cathedrals, they are our utopian vision, our garden of Eden, serving up delights for the eyes. We seek meaning and significance in such places and can't figure out why we never find it there.

Their sadness is not over sin but over no one to sell to any more. They too stand far off and lament the losses, without remorse for sin or robbed glory.

The Bible says that there is an economic paradise coming, but it's not here and we should not be trying to build it or find it or make it happen here. That is God's gift to those who remain faithful and fruitful here.

***The mariners [vv. 17b-19]).***

These are the laborers. These are the one who transport what the merchants export.

They were outsiders looking in, viewing the destruction from a distance. But they had a close connection to Babylon and benefited from that connection (19).

The common thread in all three is how quickly the destruction came and how quickly they lost everything they had gained. They no doubt thought they would enjoy their pleasures for a very long time, just look how long it had gone on. Jesus hasn't come for two thousand years, it can easily seem like He may never come. So when it all ends so suddenly, it shocks them to the core.

There is a great reversal coming and all will be shocked because they have become so complacent, thinking God has done nothing so God will do nothing.

**Ecclesiastes 8:11-13** Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil. 12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

**Fourth, the rejoicing of the faithful once Babylon's judgment is complete (vv. 20-24).**

The seventh and final angelic message is a contrast to the previous responses. Notice the difference between the response of the wicked and the righteous.

There will be rejoicing when God wins the victory, there will be tears of joy over justice being done.

Those oppressed by wickedness will rejoice at their deliverance and vindication. They will celebrate God's justice. They will extol His great power. They will worship Him for His mercy and forgiveness.

A graphic picture is painted of a single mighty angel hurling a massive *millstone* into the depths of the sea. It is finished and will be no more. The wicked world will perish forever.

There is something about the depths of the sea and finality. What is lost there is irretrievable. Six times the text says no more (ESV) or never again (NIV).

Babylon is no more. Her music, arts and crafts, industry, light and joy of relationships are all no more. The eating, drinking and making merry will be short-lived and then gone. All the good gifts and good things God created for good purposes, but were abused, will be lost.

Every evil thought and action will be done and gone forever.

### **Implications and Applications.**

How do we view the world? What is our relationship to the world? Are we in the world and a part of the world? Are we in the world but not of the world?

The old saying comes to mind, a ship is made for the sea, but when the sea gets in the ship, there is trouble.

**Revelation 18:4** 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.

We are to be in the world, but when the world gets in us, our souls are in peril. If you get too close to fire you get burned.

The world is a spiritual red light district. Where are we going to get our spiritual needs met? To whom do you turn for help? Where do you look for safety, security, health, strength, affirmation, purpose in life, self-esteem?

Temptation is real. The world, the flesh and the devil are powerful forces. Their message is attractive. Those who don't have what the world offers, desire it strongly. Those who have what the world offers, want more of it. This power can only be broken by one more powerful.

What will we lament when Babylon is gone? Will we miss the worldly pleasures? Will we lament with the kings, the merchants and the seamen? Do we lament the loss of worldly pleasures and gains and entertainment?

Wealth and judgment are linked here. What are we to make of that? Why are there so many warnings to the rich in the Bible? Why is wealth so dangerous? Because it seduces, it's like a mistress.

When sin is punished what do we do? Are we sorry we got caught or are we sad that God's glory and holiness was transgressed? Are you more concerned about those affected or about yourself? Do we regret what we have lost or rejoice in what we have gained?

Are we living for what we were made to live for? Do we enjoy God's good gifts within His boundaries and what is good for us?

Scripture says we are living in the last days, in a day of approaching slaughter and judgment. The day of the Lord is coming and indeed is near. By faith, trusting only in the Lord let us prepare our hearts and homes and finances for that day. Let us not live like those Scripture warns us about, but live with a clear sense that God has written eternity in our hearts.

I wonder if John recalled the words he had written many years before in the letter we call I John?

**I John 2:15-17** 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.