

St. Therese Catholic Church

Book of Revelation
Chapter 18

April 1, 2025

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Overview

- We have heard about the destruction of Babylon briefly three times in Revelation (14:8; 16:19; 17:16). Now comes a vision of Babylon's demise that fills an entire chapter (287).
- While Babylon was a historical empire that captured God's covenant people, conquered Jerusalem, and destroyed the Jerusalem Temple in 586 BC, it also served as a symbol of any earthly or spiritual power opposed to God.
- The depiction of Babylon's judgment in Rev. 18 has the air of a solemn drama enacted before the eyes of John and its readers (287).

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Overview

Chapter 18 Overview

First	A luminous angel appears center stage to announce in a prophetic past tense what will become of Babylon.
Second	A voice from heaven warns God's people to separate themselves from her sins in order to avoid her punishment.
Third	The kings, merchants, and seafarers who had profited from Babylon's power and wealth, stand and eulogize her as if at a funeral, mourning their loss, while heaven's inhabitants are invited to rejoice.
Fourth	A mighty angel appears, declares with a dramatic symbolic gesture the certainty and absolute finality of Babylon's destruction, and reiterates the crimes that led to her demise.

Williamson, 287-288

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Proclamation of Babylon's Fall

- **Another angel:** Another angel of the seven bowl judgments comes to announce the fall of Babylon.
- **Illumined by his splendor:** In Sacred Scripture, angels are often associated with light and the radiant presence of God.
- **Fallen, fallen:** The angel expands on the first announcement of the fall of Babylon in 14:8. The repetition conveys finality.
- **Haunt and Cage:** The formerly rich and exquisitely adorned city has become a total ruin, inhabited only by wild animals and demons (288).

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Proclamation of Babylon's Fall

Babylon

Abundance of Wealth	Spiritual Poverty
Cargo of gold, silver, precious stones, pearls; fine linen, purple silk, and scarlet cloth (18:12)	Haunt for demons Cage for unclean spirits Cage for every unclean bird (18:2)
Fragrant wood of every kind, all articles of ivory and all articles of the most expensive wood, bronze, iron and marble (18:12)	Wine of licentious passion Kings of the earth have intercourse with her (18:3)
Cinnamon spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves (18:13)	Merchants of the earth grew rich from her drive for luxury (18:3)

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Proclamation of Babylon's Fall

- While Babylon has enriched nations, kings, and merchants, she has corrupted the whole world by seducing these three groups into her immorality (289).



Nations



Political Leaders



Businesspeople

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Proclamation of Babylon's Fall

- The graphic of sexual immorality suggests that this type of morality was prevalent in pagan culture and religion.
- However, immorality as a metaphor for idolatry is often mentioned in the Old Testament (Hosea 2:4-15) and in Revelation (2:20-22).
- The resemblance of Revelation 18 with the prophecies about the merchant kingdom of Tyre (Isa. 23:16-17; Ezek. 26-28) suggests that the primary focus is on an inordinate desire for material goods that leads to doing anything for money. Babylon and her clients exercise no restraint (289).

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Warning God's People

- **Depart from her my people:** This first verse is very important since it contains the only specific instruction that God gives to his people in the context of Babylon's impending destruction (290).
- Whereas Isaiah summoned the Jews to physically depart from Babylon before God's impending judgment falls on it and return to Jerusalem, the voice from heaven summons John's audience to keep a spiritual distance from the corruption of society in which they live, "Babylon." (290).
- **2 Cor. 6:17:** "Therefore, come forth from them and be separate," says the Lord.

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Warning God's People

- Two communities are contrasted in the Book of Revelation. Christians have communion in Jesus (1:9) and Babylon involves communion with sin and evil works.
- When God calls people out of Babylon in passages like Isaiah 52:9 or Jeremiah 51:45, God is calling them to leave the country of Babylon physically. Isaiah speaks of a new Exodus from Babylon back to Jerusalem.
- The voice – it could either be Jesus or his Father – is inviting people to leave somewhere not physically but spiritually (McIlraith, 156).

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Warning God's People

- We must constantly call on Jesus to strengthen our nuptial bond of love with him especially when we find ourselves living in Babylon.
- He is the Way out of Babylon. It is by his work (2:26) that we become the New Jerusalem.
- By our works, we decide the covenant to which we want to belong: Christ's or the dragon's. Babylon is the communion of those who have chosen evil works (McIlraith, 156-157).

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Warning God's People

- **God remembers:** When it says God remembers in Sacred Scripture, it means he focuses his attention so as to take the appropriate action, in this case to render judgment on Babylon's crimes (literally, her "acts of justice") (291).
- **Into her cup:** Babylon will drink from the cup of divine wrath because of her capital crimes – idolatry, immorality, and greed for excessive consumption – and she is guilty of leading all the nations into these abominable crimes (291).

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Warning God's People

- **Boasting and wantonness:** Babylon is guilty of arrogance and excessive indulgence.
- **Torment and grief:** God will repay Babylon with torture and deep sorrow.
- **One day:** God's punishment will be sudden and swift (292).
- **The Lord God who judges her:** The Lord God will bring about the complete destruction of the community that is opposed to him and his will.

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Warning God's People

Attributes of the Whore Babylon

Capital city of the pagan empire that destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 586 BC.	Figuratively alludes to the Roman Empire, and immoral and idolatrous society, and to other societies that do the same.
Symbolizes an arrogant center of international economic and cultural power that consumes goods all over the world.	The harlot Babylon corrupts the world, inducing rulers and peoples of the nations to drink "the wine of her licentious passion." (14:8)
Babylon is the source of idolatry, of making a god of created things.	Babylon is allied with the beast (17:3), political power that is opposed to God and his people.

~Williamson, 293

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Kings, Merchants, and Seafarers

- The central section of the chapter (18:9-19) consists of three dirges lamenting the fall of Babylon (McIlraith, 157).
- Three groups (kings, merchants, and those in the shipping industry) share three laments:
 - All "keep their distance for fear of the torment inflicted on her;"
 - "Alas, alas, great city, Babylon, might city;"
 - All express shock and awe at the suddenness of Babylon's destruction in one hour (295).
- Babylon, while extremely wealthy, will be totally destroyed (296).

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Warning God's People

Group	Explanation	Christ
Kings (vv 9 – 10)	Had intercourse (literally committed fornication); corrupt political and commercial collaboration	Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth (1:5); they lost their power in an "hour," the hour of the Cross (McIlraith, 157).
Merchants (vv 11 – 17)	Benefited economically from the idolatrous covenant. Now, nobody buys their goods (28 goods are listed); they keep their distance.	The Lamb is our treasure. The Lamb appears 28 times. There are four corners of the world and seven, the universal or complete Lordship of Jesus (McIlraith, 157).
Seafarers (vv 17 - 19)	Throw dust on their heads as a sign of mourning; they have lost the means for obtaining their wealth.	The Lamb is our true wealth. We weep and mourn for our sins and grow spiritually rich from the grace and forgiveness of Christ.

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Two Contrasting Cities

Babylon	New Jerusalem
Wears fine linen (Greek <i>bussinon</i>), purple, and scarlet; adorned [in] gold, precious stones, and pearls.	The prepared Wife is robed (same word used for Babylon) with fine linen (<i>bussinon</i>). Wedding robe is bright and clean, not scarlet and purple. City is decorated with gold, jewels, and pearls, as every bride should be.
She is made a desert in one hour.	The city will last forever; God will always be with them (Rev. 21:3).

McIlraith, 157 – 158

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Kings, Merchants, and Seafarers

- After the three groups who mourn Babylon's demise, heaven and its inhabitants are invited to rejoice (18:20).

Universal Courtroom	Explanation
Plaintiffs	Christians together with all those killed on earth (18:24)
Defendant	Babylon / Rome – charged with murder in the interest of power and idolatry
Presiding Judge	God
Heaven rejoices at the termination of the reign of evil and injustice.	

Williamson, 301

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Huge Millstone

- A mighty angel:** Picks up a high millstone and throws it into the sea. Whereas Babylon's destruction was told in the past tense in Rev. 18:2-3, verses 21-23 tells of the city's judgment in the future tense (302).
- Huge Millstone:** As a millstone will inevitably fall to the bottom of the sea, so Babylon's destruction is inevitable.
- Jesus used the image of a millstone tied around the neck of those who cause sin (Mt 18:6; Mk 9:42; Lk 17:2). Babylon had caused many to sin (Rev. 14:8).

18



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Babylon Destroyed

- **No melodies of harpists:** The poignant words describing the cessation of all that pertains to normal human life reveal what is happening to Babylon is the retribution it deserves. What Babylon has given she will receive (302).
- **Key:** Babylon is a symbol of every nation that has harmed God's people through all of history against which God will render just judgment in favor of his covenant people (302).
- Babylon's sin has been to deceive and lead astray all the nations (18:23). This means they are instruments of the dragon, leading people away from Christ (McIlraith, 158).

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Babylon Destroyed

Human Activity	Explanation
No music	Music is celebratory, makes life festive.
No craftsmen	Trades are needed for building and maintaining a city.
No lights	Absence of light is a symbol of immorality.
No marriage	Family life, the foundation of a society, ceases.

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Babylon Destroyed

- **Led astray by your magic potion:** In Greek, potion is *pharmakeia*, which other versions translate as “sorcery” and “magic spells.” Literally the word refers to the misuse of drugs or use of occult power (302).
- It could also be taken as a metaphor for Babylon’s proffered material prosperity, which seduces people to embrace a way of life and values that are idolatrous, greedy, and immoral (303).
- **Blood:** In the Bible, “blood” is used figuratively to refer to responsibility for murder (Gn. 4:10; Dt. 21:1-9) (303).

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Babylon Destroyed

- Babylon is embodied wherever cultures and socioeconomic systems draw people away from worshipping God and toward sin and the worship of idols (303).
- Rome was one such embodiment, as were Tyre and ancient Babylon before her. Contemporary Western culture with its self-centeredness, materialism, and immorality is another. All of these will eventually meet their end, whether gradually or suddenly (303).
- Christians are called to live in the world but not be *of the world*. Their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20).

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Babylon Destroyed

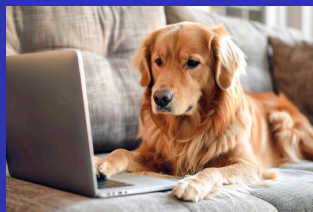
- In Revelation, the destruction of Babylon comes at the end of history, at the pouring out of the seventh bowl of God's wrath (303).
- The fall of Babylon, therefore, represents more than the fall of one particular culture and socioeconomic system. Rather, it is judgment on the entirety of human social and economic life insofar as it is opposed to God (303).
- The fall of Babylon ends with the heavenly liturgy that celebrates its judgment. The way is now ready for the New Jerusalem (McIlraith, 158).

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Next Time

- Tuesday, April 22nd



Revelation 19	
Heavenly celebration over Babylon's destruction	19:1 – 4
The Victory Song	19:5 – 10
The King of Kings	19:11 – 21

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