

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

8-15-18

Revelation 18

Revelation chapter 18 describes the destruction of Babylon by fire. Scriptural Babylon is used as a symbol of worldliness and of false worship. (Materialism is a form of false worship.) In ancient Israel the punishment for adultery was death by strangulation or stoning. However, harlotry or adultery by the daughter of a priest was considered a more serious offense, and was punished by burning. (Leviticus 21:9.) John again borrows heavily from Ezekiel's imagery. (Compare Revelation chapter 18 to Ezekiel chapter 43.)

Lament Over Fallen Babylon - Verses 1-3

¹After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. ²With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal. ³For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

18:1 This chapter shows the complete destruction of Babylon, John's metaphorical name for the evil world power and all it represents. Everything that tries to block God's purposes will come to a violent end.

18:2-3 Merchants in the Roman Empire grew rich by exploiting the sinful pleasures of their society. Many businesspeople today do the same thing. Businesses and governments are often based on greed, money, and power. Many bright individuals are tempted to take advantage of an evil system to enrich themselves. Christians are warned to stay free from the lure of money, status, and the good life. We are to live according to the values Christ exemplified: service, giving, self-sacrifice, obedience, and truth.

Warning to Escape Babylon's Judgment - Verses 4-8

⁴Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people," so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; ⁵for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. ⁶Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup. ⁷Give her as much torment and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit enthroned as queen. I am not a widow; I will never mourn.' ⁸Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

18:4-8 The people of Babylon had lived in luxury and pleasure. The city boasted, "I sit enthroned as queen. . . . I will never mourn." The powerful, wealthy people of this world are susceptible to this same attitude. A person who is financially comfortable often feels invulnerable, secure, and in control, feeling no need for God or anyone else. This kind of attitude defies God, and his judgment against it is harsh. We are told to avoid Babylon's sins. If you are financially secure, don't become complacent and deluded by the myth of self-sufficiency. Use your resources to help others and advance God's kingdom.

Threefold Woe Over Babylon's Fall - Verses 9-20

9 "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. **10** Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!" **11** "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore— **12** cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; **13** cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves. **14** "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' **15** The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn **16** and cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! **17** In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin! "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. **18** When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' **19** They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!" **20** "Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you."

18:9-10 Those who are tied to the world's system will lose everything when it collapses. What they have worked for a lifetime to build up will be destroyed in one hour. Those who work only for material rewards will have nothing when they die or when their possessions are destroyed. What can we take with us to the new earth? Our faith, our Christian character, and our relationships with other believers. These are more important than any amount of money, power, or pleasure.

18:9-19 Those who are in control of various parts of the economic system will mourn at Babylon's fall. The political leaders will mourn because they were the overseers of Babylon's wealth and were in a position to enrich themselves greatly. The merchants will mourn because Babylon, the greatest customer for their goods, will be gone. The sea captains will no longer have anywhere to bring their goods because the merchants will have nowhere to sell them.

The fall of the evil world system affects all who enjoyed and depended on it. No one will remain unaffected by Babylon's fall.

18:11-14 The voice from heaven (18:4) continued to prophesy against the greedy merchants. "The fruit you longed for" and the "luxury and splendor" were gone. This list of various merchandise illustrates the extreme materialism of this society. Few of these goods were necessities—most are luxuries. Even people had become commodities—"human beings" were "sold as slaves" to Babylon. The desire for nonessential luxuries had driven these merchants. Yet, how many of these luxuries listed are in your home? Most people will find that they own almost everything on this list. We are people who truly live in great luxury. We, too, are in danger of being absorbed in possessions and pleasure. Make sure that your desires lead you in the right direction. Put boundaries on them. Don't go after everything you see. Keep your desires on serving God and building his kingdom by helping others.

18:11-19 God's people should not live for money, because money will be worthless in eternity. And they should keep on guard constantly against greed, a sin that is always ready to take over their lives. God wants us to work and to provide for our families, and he commands the proper use of money. But when the desire for money fills our lives, it becomes a false god. Don't be enslaved by the desire for wealth.

The Finality of Babylon's Doom - Verses 21-24

²¹ Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. ²² The music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No worker of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. ²³ The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's important people. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. ²⁴ In her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth."

18:20-24 The destruction of the Babylonian system is the final blow to the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). This is the triumph of God in time. The Babylonian system is a religious system combined with a material system.

Today many worship wealth. Wealth is their terminal value. They live for nothing higher. Money is their god. Do you have a proclivity to shack up with the religion/wealth belief system?

God will eventually restore the truth of things into their proper place in time and space.