

THE END OF THE WORLD - BABYLON

As you can see from the heading of chapter 18 in the NIV Bible, this passage has to do with the fall of Babylon. Remember that chapter 17 gave a description of Babylon? She is the great prostitute. She is the secular, worldwide city and the tool Satan uses to seduce people to commit evil. There was, of course, a historical Babylon and kings like Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar were its kings. That Babylon fell because of its godlessness. We read about that in Daniel 5.

But now chapters 17 and 18 are not just talking about Babylon of the past. Babylon has come to mean the secular world of all time, which is pagan and anti-Christ. Babylon is the worldliness of the world. It's that world of trade and commerce when and where it goes against Christ's rule of righteousness and justice. It's that world of entertainment when and where Christ's purity and holiness are ignored. It's that world of politics when and where Christ's peace and compassion has no place. In short, it is a world characterised by a culture that is secular, humanistic and materialistic. When and wherever that kind of world has existed in the past, is now present, or will be in the future, that is known in the Bible as Babylon. She is the very opposite of the kingdom of God.

Now when our King and Saviour Jesus Christ returns that world will come to an end. And chapter 18 is all about that. The chapter divides itself as follows and if you look in your Bible then you'll see where the divisions occur. Verses 1-3 announce the fall of Babylon. Verses 4-20 describe the judgment that comes on all those who are part of Babylon. And verses 21-24 speak about the death of Babylon.

1. The fall of Babylon [vs. 1-3].

An angel, having great authority and with much splendour, comes down from heaven to make the announcement. It means that God Himself tells us about the end of the world. Not some modern false prophet of doom but God. He is the One who controls and rules over time and history.

As you know by now the book Revelation takes us through the history of the world several times, especially the last days, also known as that figurative thousand years between Christ's first and second comings. Sometimes Revelation makes us see the world from the viewpoint of the godless world itself. At other times it makes us look at what goes on from the viewpoint of the church. But here in chapter 18 the world is seen from heaven's viewpoint.

The advantage of seeing the world as God does, is to realise that God rules over and controls everything. You are blessed when you can see that God's hand is there in all events and happenings in the world, and indeed over our own lives. That very fact keeps us from getting ourselves all tangled up and despairing in the complexities of this world in which we exist. People, even Christians, can become depressed by what goes on in the world because we can no longer see purpose and meaning. But knowing that God is fulfilling His plan of salvation stops you from panicking when you are overwhelmed by the world's evil and corruption. God will end the world's wickedness in His own good time.

Now in this connection we must also not allow ourselves to be fooled by those who claim to have God's timetable all worked out. I remember reading a little booklet wherein the author explained chapter 18 in such a way that the modern nation of Israel, the Middle East, the papacy, the European Union, the USA, and communism all get to play a part. But people who limit the book Revelation to world events in their own lifetime, or in the immediate foreseeable future, are upstaged every time again by dramatic and unexpected events, like the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the World Trade Centre disaster, and other dramatic turns in history. It forces these false prophets to radically revise their prophecies and, of course, they lose credibility in the process.

Babylon does not end whenever a worldly power suffers a major setback or disappears from the map. The historical Babylon is gone but Babylon is still here. The Roman Empire has disappeared but Babylon is still here. Nazi Germany is gone but Babylon is still here. The map of the world map has been re-drawn several times in our lifetime but Babylon is still there. As long as society is concerned more with economic wealth than spiritual riches from God, more busy with sinful pleasures than with good, clean entertainment, more preoccupied where good restaurants are than where good churches are, more dependent on what financial planners have to say than what Christ's gospel has to say, then it is still a worldly society. Wherever there is

an indifference to Christ and His teaching, there we still have a Babylon. And the Word of God says here that God's judgment will cause her to fall. It's inevitable and irrevocable.

We have an example of this in the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar and his successor Balshazzar. Theirs was a godless society where the ruling class was corrupt, more interested in entertainment, feasting and drinking, than the teaching of God through His prophet Daniel. But when the mysterious writing on the wall appeared, causing fear and panic, then the God of Daniel was remembered and Daniel was called back into service to explain the writing and speak on God's behalf. Well, Daniel did exactly that but there was no mercy, nor grace, in what God said through Daniel. The writing was well and truly on the wall. This Babylon of history past had been weighed on the scales of heaven and found wanting. Its kingdom came to an abrupt and disastrous end.

So will it be with the Babylon of all time at Jesus' coming. The verses 2 and 3 describe the world where the people behave like demons and evil spirits have taken over, making it a terrible place. It's a godless society about to be forsaken by God forever. The nations are drunk with their immoral lust, their rulers corrupt and their businessmen grown rich through unfair and dishonest dealings, spurred on by greed. Yes, the worldliness of the world will cause its own downfall but it is God who will bring it about in His judgment.

2. The judgment of Babylon [vs. 4-20].

Another voice from heaven gives an urgent command to God's people to come out of the worldliness of the world: "... so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues."

God's command to His people to separate themselves from the world may also mean that God will take His people out of the world before God brings His final judgment on the world. It's the rapture of which 1 Thessalonians 4 speaks: "*The Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*" [vs.16-17].

Throughout history God has of course repeatedly commanded His people to come out of the godless city, out and away from a pagan culture, in order not to share in her sins and not receive any of her plagues. Noah was told to build a boat and God took him and family away to safety before the Flood destroyed everyone. Abraham was called away from his native country and his people, and led to a land where he could serve the Lord. Lot was told to leave Sodom and escape the fire of God's wrath on that sinful city. The Israelites were told to leave Egypt in order to freely worship and serve God.

It happens again in the New Testament. The Second letter to the Corinthians says this: "*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.'* Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord" [2 Cor. 6: 14-17].

God is still saying it and soon He will take us out of this world for good before His final judgment will put an end to Babylon.

You and I must realise that we are placing ourselves in great spiritual danger by being judged by God along with the world every time we copy the world's foul language, like using its f-words; or repeat its curses and swearing, like its four-letter words; or mouth its blasphemy, its frequent 'oh my God' utterances; or become involved in its wicked entertainment, its evil practices, and its greed and materialism. Those who are the same as the world will perish with the world.

Yes, of course, we must live in the world, but we are not to become part of the world. God wants us to be a salt and a light in the world, but always being mindful that compromise with the world can be fatal. There will be many times that the followers of Christ will have to separate themselves from the world in order not to be seduced by her.

As the end of the world comes closer, then the separation between God's church and the world will become more definite. You and I will increasingly have to decide to make a stand for Christ. In His high-priestly

prayer Jesus said that He is not asking the Father to take His people out of the world, because the time for that had not yet come. But the Lord did pray to His heavenly Father that He protect those whom Jesus saves from the evil one [Jn.17:15].

As the Lord protects us from the evil one, then it may bring unemployment and therefore fewer material possessions and perhaps hunger. May be persecution. But the Lord knows about this and for that reason those days will be shortened. For the sake of the elect. When the world becomes a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, and worldly society is quite unclean, then Christians just cannot live in that world any more. It's a world whose sins are piled up to heaven and God remembers her crimes.

Now you will probably have wondered about the vindictiveness that seems to be there in the verses 6-8, which say: "*Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.*"

Is this vindictiveness or is this God's full judgment? Is this mere revenge or has the time for God's patience and grace run out? Well, God's salvation and mercy have never meant that He will never punish sin, or punish evil less than what it deserves. Yes, the Saviour received sin's punishment for those who have repented and believed in Him. But Babylon rejects God's mercy and ignores Christ's offer of salvation. She, therefore, will face the full consequences of all her crimes against heaven. God has always maintained that He will avenge. There will come a time that God will judge and it will be as terrible as it will be just.

Then verses 9-19 are a lengthy section describing the heartache of a world that knows it is going under. It is a weeping from sinners who are not really sorry for their sins but bemoan the fact that they and their businesses are ruined. The reaction of these worldly people is the same kind of regret that Pharaoh showed when he realised he could not stop God from taking His people out of Egypt. It's the same kind of regret which Roman Empire showed when she knew she was in her last days. It's the language of those who know the writing is on the wall. They just know that their godless society has fallen. They're not blind when they see what's going on.

The first to start crying are "*the kings of the earth*" [vs.9]. It breaks their heart to see their world, the society they created, go under. Their cries are followed by the weeping of the merchants or the business people of the world. They realise that their income has dried up. It hurts their pocket, and being materialistically minded, they feel mighty sorry for themselves.

Yes, what a strange world it will be in the final days of her doom! Strange because worldly people are no longer interested in buying the very things they have always coveted. Luxury, pleasure, exotic foods and drinks - there is no longer a demand for them and therefore they disappear.

Why? What is happening? Well, those whose lives centred on all these things are so filled with fear and hate against Christ that interest in material things has now receded into the background.

How poor and empty will the world without God become. It will be a world from which all riches, outward beauty and culture is gone and in its place will be hopelessness, fear and hate. Is this not increasingly true of our present society? Slowly but surely Australia is being de-Christianised. Our generation sees time again the undermining of biblical morality. Laws are passed that fly in the face of God's commandments and it happens because society wants it that way. But as society moves away from a biblical foundation we see a marked increase in crime and rebellion, brokenness and despair, lawlessness and hopelessness.

The last lot to weep and moan over a world gone under are those who "*had ships on the sea*" [vs.19]. These are shipowners and they have no cargoes to transport. Trade and commerce have come to a halt. There is nothing to transport any more. So these people also see their incomes eroded and they too are desperate. They're not upset because of sin but because of their financial losses. No one worries about his or her relationship with the great Judge of all the earth. There is no concern for peace with Him and eternal life through Christ. Just a fearful regret about the lack of economic security.

But then a cry of rejoicing breaks through this litany of woes. Verse 20 tells us that it comes from heaven, the saints, apostles and prophets. It's the church in heaven and on earth. They rejoice because God is finally judging those who persecuted His children in Christ.

But should the church of the Lord Jesus Christ not be sad about the judgment of Babylon? Should Christians not weep when they see pagan society going under because of the judgment of God? Is this not a time for believers to show concern for the lost? We worry about our unbelieving children and friends as they slide away from God and we are extremely worried about them going over the edge for good. So how can God's Word here say - rejoice!?

Well, this rejoicing does not mean Christians are indifferent about the lot of unbelievers. Christians are not going to stand there clapping their hands in glee. The reason why Christians will rejoice is because that anti-God and anti-Christian culture will finally end and in its place will come the full kingdom of God. The shedding of the blood of the saints, from Abel to that of the last Christian martyr, will finally stop. The Christians in prison because of their faith and Christians hounded and driven underground in Islamic and totalitarian countries, will rejoice because God has once and for all triumphed over all opposition to His kingdom. The rejoicing is there because the world of pagan people is no longer on top but God and His righteousness are.

3. The death of Babylon [vs. 21-24].

We looked at her fall, her judgment, and now her death. John sees a mighty angel pick up a huge boulder and hurl it into the sea. It would have produced a big splash. With such strength God will throw the great city of Babylon into hell. After it's gone there is an eerie silence and the place where the city was is empty. Babylon is no more. The world of the godless has disappeared completely. Its lights have gone out.

Notice the emphasis on the silence and emptiness? Six times the passage speaks of things "*never being heard again*." or "*never being found again*". The voice of the musicians and their music will be heard no more. The sound of the world's pop groups, solo singers, bands, orchestras and operas will not be heard of again. There is no joy and nothing to celebrate or to party about any more. It's not the end of music and singing as such. There will be lots of that on the new earth. But it will only be of the kind that praises God. All the secular stuff with its non-Christian contents will disappear forever.

The sound of the millstone is no longer heard. It means the hubbub of the world's industry and economic activity will be stilled. The world's stock exchanges will shut down for good.

Even the voice of the bridegroom and bride will be heard no more. The sounds of laughter and fun at weddings will be silenced. The world's social activities and other human interactions will cease to exist.

Like the Titanic sinking beneath the surface of the sea, with all its activities and its lights disappearing from view, so also will the civilisation of man-without-God disappear for ever. Sin has once more, and now for the last time, dug its own grave. The end of the world, the fall of Babylon, the judgment of God, will take place. She has sealed their own doom because, "*In her was found the blood of the prophets and of the saints and of all who have been killed on the earth.*"

Chapter 18, then, speaks of the final and irrevocable destruction of godless society. It will happen. When? We don't know but it may be very close. Although heaven and the Lord's church rejoice in God's final victory over a godless world, chapter 18 is actually also a very sad chapter because of the hardening of the heart against the gospel of salvation. To God that is unforgivable. So more than ever before, in the time that is still left, the non-Christian must turn to God in true repentance. Now is the time to be no longer involved in an ungodly way in an ungodly society. Now is the day of salvation. One day, and it could be very soon, it will be too late.

The book Revelation does not stop after the godless world has finally died. There is another city, the heavenly Jerusalem. In what must be some of the most beautiful and moving chapters of the Bible, the future existence of the church on the new earth is gloriously described. And frankly I have been looking forward to these final chapters in Revelation, and I trust the same of you. I want to look at the description of the new heaven and earth and in anticipation hear the hallelujahs being sung. Yes, we must do our best to really enjoy the last chapters of Revelation. Amen.

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