**Revelation**

*Lesson 34 – Revelation 18:1-24*

* Babylon is symbolic of those non-Christian nations that set themselves up against God so God is pouring out His final wrath in great judgment.
* In Revelation 17:1 John was promised that he would be shown “the judgment of the great prostitute”. Although he was given a brief glimpse in 17:16, the full story is now told in chapter18.
* The major sections of the OT that provide background to this chapter in Revelation are Jeremiah 50-51 (prophesying the fall of Babylon) and Ezekiel 27 (prophesying the fall of Tyre).

*Verses 1-3: Announcing Babylon’s Fall*

1. This angel that comes and makes the announcement has the glory of God shining around him and has “great authority,” both of which signify that this angel is speaking on behalf of God Himself and the message of the angel can be taken as true because it is God speaking through His angel messenger. It might be that this angel is Christ Himself. Greg Beale argues that every time “glory” is used to describe a heavenly figure in Revelation it is either referring to God or Christ (1:6; 4:9, 11; 5:12-13; 7:12; 11:13; 14:7, etc.).
2. The angel speaks this announcement “with a mighty voice” to get people’s attention, especially those who are in danger of falling under Babylon’s spell.
3. All of the verbs in this section are in the past tense, as if the events the angel is announcing, have already happened. This indicates that the judgment is certain. In one sense it has already happened, because God has decreed it to happen. So even though it’s still in the future in relation to our time, it’s certain because God has ordained it so. (Compare Rev. 14:8)
4. The description is one of desolation and complete destruction. Despite Babylon’s allure, in her fall, she’s going to become an unclean place, inhabited by unclean animals and demons. It will be a place that people avoid out of fear and disgust. **Jeremiah 50:39** – “Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her. She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations. **Jeremiah 51:37 –** “and Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant.”
5. And the reason for this is laid out in verse 3. She has committed sexual immorality, idolatry, and she has seduced the nations, kings of the earth, and merchants of the earth with her sinful lifestyle. **Isaiah 23:17** – “At the end of seventy years, the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her wages and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth. Compare Ezekiel 27:33-36.
6. “To drink here refers to one’s willingness to commit to idolatry in order to maintain economic security. Once one imbibes, the intoxicating influence removes all desire to resist Babylon’s destructive influence, blinds one to Babylon’s own ultimate insecurity and to God as the source of real security, and numbs one against any fear of a coming judgment.” –Greg Beale

*Verses 4-8: Exhortation for God’s People to Come Out*

1. After this announcement of Babylon’s fall, another angel cries out for God’s people to separate themselves from Babylon. Though they have been living in the midst of Babylon, they are to remain separate from Babylon and not identify with her. Christians who are tempted to compromise with the world will share in the plagues of Babylon’s judgment. This is a spiritual separation, because we’re not to lock ourselves away in a monastery. Becoming a monk or nun doesn’t get rid of the world that still remains in our hearts.
2. “To depart from Babylon means not to have fellowship with her sins and not to be ensnared by her allurements and enticements. Those who set their heart on the world shall also receive of her plagues.” –William Hendriksen
3. Babylon’s sins are described as piled or heaped high as heaven. This is an allusion to the Tower of Babel where the people of the earth wanted to build a tower to reach God/heaven, but the only thing that reaches heaven from sinful man is their sins. **Ezra 9:6** – “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.” **Jeremiah 51:9** – “We would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed. Forsake her, and let us go each to his own country, for her judgment has reached up to heaven and has been lifted up even to the skies.”
4. But verse 7 indicates that Babylon fails to heed God’s Word. She thinks all is well and she will never be destroyed. She has no conscience or conviction of sin. Though the world (that which is opposed to God) may seem to flourish and puffed up in arrogance, one day God is going to pay her what is due to her.
5. This is exactly what we see in verse 6. “Pay her back as she has paid back others” is another way of saying the punishment will fit the crime (“an eye for an eye”). Verse 7 also says “give her a like measure” meaning that the punishment for her self-glory and luxurious living is going to be matched by her torment and mourning. But doesn’t the second and third lines of verse 6 say pay her double? That makes it seem like she’s getting more punishment than what she’s due. How are we to understand this?
6. The Greek is literally “pay double the double.” Some argue that “double” here is a poor translation and that it should be translated “equivalent” or “duplicate” based on how this word is used in the Septuagint. In other words, just like a coin has 2 sides, so the “double” refers to the punishment of God (1 side) upon the wicked deeds (the other side). Others see an OT background here from verses like Ex 22:4, 7, 9; Isa 40:2; Jer 16:18; and Zech 9:12. **Exodus 22:4** – “If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double.” In the Levitical law, double recompense was required to make restitution for a crime committed.
7. And these plagues, death, mourning, and famine will come upon Babylon in 1 day (later on a single hour), showing the swiftness of God’s judgment as well as His overwhelming power and might in judgment. We see here that fire is used as a symbol for God’s judgment.

*Verses 9-10: Lament of Kings of the Earth*

1. Now we come to the reaction of those friends and allies of Babylon. First, in these verses the kings of the earth will mourn and sing a lament for Babylon. The kings of the earth were rich, prosperous, and victorious because of their alliance with Babylon. Now their source of power and riches lies in ruins. They are in despair over economic loss. Verse 10 says they stand far off because they do not want to get swept up in her destruction. They were eagerly willing to share in her good times, but they do not want to share in the times of suffering. And they lament the days gone by when Babylon was a great city, outwardly rich and luxurious with power and sinful pleasure.

*Verses 11-17a: Lament of Merchants of the Earth*

1. Next the merchants mourn and sing a lament for Babylon. Here the fact that the despair is over economic loss is even more explicit. Nobody is buying their cargo anymore and that cargo is described in verses 12-13. Everything between the gold and scarlet cloth describes how Babylon was dressed when described as a prostitute in Revelation 17. Everything else is what the historical empires of Babylon and Rome overindulged in, in sinful and idolatrous way. Also notice the last item in the list of cargo that’s now worthless – slaves. These merchants and Babylon were willing to sell and buy anything that could get them money, including people. They did anything and everything to enrich themselves. Compare this to Ezekiel 27:28-32. Everybody is mourning because Babylon’s loss is their loss.
2. This list includes 28 items that make up the mineral world, the plant world, the animal world, and the human world. 28 is a product of 4x7, with 4 being the number for universal or world-wide and 7 being the number of perfection. These items are perfect representatives of all of the products of the whole world that the sinful nations use to enrich themselves and their ungodly worship.
3. Verse 14 shows that the heart of the sinful world is sinful longings for these things which is idolatry. “The core of Babylon’s being is committed to satisfying herself with economic wealth instead of desiring God’s glory.” –Greg Beale
4. Verse 15 says that the merchants, just like the kings, also stand far off. Again, not willing to share in her sufferings. These are fair-weather allies. And they lament in vv16-17 all this precious wealth that was their heart’s desire being destroyed in a single hour.

*Verses 17b-19: Lament of Mariners on the Sea*

1. Now the focus is on the mourning and lament of a particular group of merchants - sea-faring merchants who profited from their economic alliance with Babylon. The language here is very similar to verses 9-11 so I will only point out that the main difference is in verse 19 and the reference to throwing dust on their heads. They are showing sorrow for their own personal financial loss. But this is not godly repentance.

*Verses 20-24: Rejoicing of the Faithful at the Fall of Babylon*

1. Finally, we see what the true response to the fall of Babylon should be. The world has mourned and lamented Babylon’s fall, but they haven’t repented of their sins and turned to God. Verse 20 calls all of the people of God to rejoice in Babylon’s destruction because God has judged her on behalf of His people. He has given judgment “for you.”
2. **Jeremiah 51:48** – “Then the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, shall sing for joy over Babylon, for the destroyers shall come against them out of the north, declares the LORD.” Just as the judgment of historical Babylon in ancient times was a cause for celebration, so too will be the judgment of spiritual Babylon, representative of all ungodly nations.
3. The permanency of this judgment is depicted with the symbolic action of the throwing of a large millstone into the sea in verse 20, followed by a listing of all the kinds of activity that will no longer be found in Babylon. There will be no joy, no music, no marriage, no artisans, no crafts, no pleasures. Greg Beale writes, “Babylon, who removed the joys of life from the saints, will have her own pleasures taken away.”
4. Then the cause for celebration over her judgment ends this section with the reminder that Babylon was the one who killed the prophets and saints. She was guilty of the blood of the martyrs. God has acted to vindicate both the honor of His name and righteousness as well as those who were killed for their testimony to Jesus Christ.

**Message for Us**

1. “The power of Babylon’s allure is surely at least as powerful as in John’s day. Do we really understand that behind the facade of incredible wealth and luxury lie insecurity and, ultimately, the dwelling place of demons?” –Greg Beale
2. “Purity and spiritual separation from worldliness are a repeated theme in the Bible (Isa 48:20; 52:11; Jer 50:8; 51:6; 2 Cor 6:17). When the temptations are subtle, as they frequently are in modern societies, vigilance, watchfulness, and understanding of the true nature of spiritual war are necessary. The Bible as a whole summons us to be aware of Satan’s schemes (2 Cor 2:11).” –Sinclair Ferguson
3. “Whenever you feel the lure of worldliness, go back to Calvary, look at the cross, and ask yourself: ‘If He did this for me, how can I possibly have anything to do with the world that crucified Him?’ The only way to be separated from the world is through the cross. So, by the blood that bought you, ‘come out…that ye be not partakers of her sins.’ –Joel Beeke
4. “No matter what type it is, all sin is ultimately directed against God. He is infinitely and immeasurably greater than man. Though murdering a human being is a greater crime than killing an animal or stealing someone’s car, any sin is committed against the eternal, infinite God. And that sin must be punished. So when you are tempted to envy the wicked who prosper here and now, remember that a day is coming when wicked, worldly, happy people will receive double for their sins. They will receive from God the exact payment for sin. When we see wicked people living it up and getting away with it, remember that they will not get away with it forever. God will settle all accounts exactly and justly. This world of sin and evil will be destroyed.” –Joel Beeke
5. “Those who are in positions of power, whether in government, industry, commerce, or entertainment, grow rich, frequently through unscrupulous practices. Others profit from serving those in power. Typically, such people cannot bear to see a change in the status quo, for it threatens the comfort of their position. But the righteous love righteousness more than any amount of earthly comfort and prosperity.” –Vern Poythress