

Revelation 17 & 18 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

Tonight we take a look at John's visions of the *Fall of Babylon* – which raises an immediate question – just what **IS Babylon?** The answer to that will unfold as we work our way through chs. 17 & 18.

John is now going to have the last of his *background* or *supporting visions*.

He's had several of these: As he has been seeing visions of the *chronological flow* of events in the last days, every so often, the Lord will give him an *in-depth vision* that highlights some part of the last days, or even sums up God's plan since the beginning. "

Chs. 17 & 18 are the last of these in-depth supporting visions and they reveal God's judgment on Babylon.

Ch. 17 highlights God's judgment of a wicked religious system, while ch. 18 shows the judgment of a political and commercial system.

Ch 17 will be accomplished at the *mid-point* of the Tribulation period, while ch. 18 takes place at the *very end* of the Tribulation.

CHAPTER 17

¹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, ²with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

One of the seven angels who had poured out the last of the judgments on earth invites John to behold a vision of the judgment of "the great harlot."

The word "*harlot*" softens the *edge* the Greek word seeks to convey; it would be better to render it as "*whore*." "

This woman is *wanton & willful* in her pursuit of illicit & evil relationships.

She doesn't enter into these unions for *romance*; she uses them to *gain power*.

That's the idea behind the word for "harlot" here; she's gone *a-whoring* with determined purpose.

The angel describes her as sitting on many waters.

In v. 15 – the waters are described as **“peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.”**

Actually, the harlot and the beast she rides described in vs. 1-6 are interpreted for us in vs. 7-18.

So let's just *read* through v. 6, then as we *work* through 7-18, we'll better understand the first verses.

³So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.* ⁴The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. ⁵And on her forehead a name was written:

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

⁶I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

So, in vs. 1 & 2, John is *invited* by one of the angel to see the judgment of the great harlot. Then in vs. 3-6, he *sees* her. He's transported to the wilderness where he sees a drunken woman, decked out in luxurious apparel, riding on a red beast covered with blasphemous names.

The beast had 7 heads, topped by 10 horns – *sounds familiar!*

We encountered a beast much like this in Ch. 12 & 13 where it represented satan and the antichrist.

In the harlot's hand is a royal cup filled with foulness, and on her head is written her name.

It was the practice in many places off the ancient world for

prostitutes to wear a small tiara or circlet around their heads with their names written on them.

This way they were easily marked out for their trade and new customers who had been referred could seek them out by name.

This was the practice in the Roman Empire and even Jeremiah spoke of the peculiar *forehead* of the harlot. ^[1]

Okay, let's move on to v. 7 and the piece all this together.

7 But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel?"

When John saw the harlot riding the red beast, he was blown away!

He knew that what he was seeing was so hideous it literally stunned him!

Today when we encounter something outrageous we say, "That is just NOT RIGHT!"

And some times we see something that we have to stop and ask ourselves – wait a minute, is this real or is this special effects, some trick?

That was the reaction of many people to the first time they saw the attacks on the twin towers.

It was so wrong, so unexpected, and so beyond their personal experience, their minds just couldn't wrap around it at first.

Then, once they realized it was real, they went in to a kind of mental shock.

That's what happened to John. What he saw was so outrageous, so *not-right*, he was stunned.

The angel snaps him out of his amazement and mental stupor with a question – Why is he amazed?!?

John ought to have understood what he was seeing.

And this gives us a key to the *spiritual lesson behind this vision*.

There is something here that you and I are to lay hold of and understand.

Though this may seem like a rather strange vision – the *spiritual reality* it speaks to is something we are to know and understand.

7 But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that

carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

The angel said, “I will tell you *the mystery* of the woman.”

In v. 5, John saw the name -

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

The word “*Mystery*” is not a part of the harlot’s name. It’s *descriptive*; an identifier of the name itself.

In other words, this is not *literal* Babylon, but a *spiritual entity*.

And this spiritual entity is the “**mother**,” *the source* of “**harlots**”, meaning *spiritual adultery*, and “**abominations**” meaning *idolatry, false religion*. “”

In order to understand just who this woman represents, we need to do a brief review of history.

Babylon is one of the more prominent themes in the Bible.

It begins in Gen. 10 where the city of Babel is first mentioned.

It’s then repeated 287 times right through the Scriptures and climaxing here in Revelation.

When you examine all these passage you realize that Babylon is the name for a great system of religious error.

It’s a counterfeit religion which plagued Israel in the OT as well as the church in the NT, and following the days of the apostles, had a tremendous influence in moving the church

from biblical simplicity to apostate confusion. [2]

Babylon becomes synonymous with the satanic counterfeit religion which competes with the True Faith.

Sometimes this competition comes in the form of *pagan religion* which attacks and challenges the true faith from *without*,

And sometimes it comes from an seduction, infiltration and perversion of the true faith from *within*. “”

In Gen. 10 & 11, we learn that Nimrod, whose name means “Let us rebel” was the founder of Babylon.

Nimrod led in the making of a city and tower that would reach to the heavens.

Archaeology has shown that that region is indeed covered with numerous ziggurats, tall mounds made of sun-dried brick, which were devoted to religious purposes.

The ancient religious art of astrology began at Babylon and the ziggurats were towers devoted to the worship of the stars and the gods they were thought to embody.

Archaeology has also discovered that Babylon became the birthplace of virtually all subsequent pagan religion.

And it all revolves around this character Nimrod introduced in Gen. 10.

While Nimrod was busy leading the *political affairs* of Babylon, his wife, *Semiramis* became the leader of the *new religious system* born there.

She developed numerous secret rituals called “mysteries” that were used by the specially appointed priests that led the worship of the idols of Babylon.

As the story goes – Nimrod was killed while hunting, and 40 days later, Semiramis realized she was miraculously pregnant.

She gave birth to a son she named Tammuz whom she claimed was actually a reincarnation of Nimrod.

Tammuz became the Savior of his people by coming back to take the throne vacated by his father.

So Tammuz ends up being a pseudo-messiah.

Semiramis and Tammuz were then elevated to the premier place in the pantheon of Babylonian gods.

Semiramis became known as the Queen of Heaven while Tammuz ended up morphing into virtually all the major deities of the ancient world; most notably – Baal. “”

One of the most common religious icons throughout the ancient Middle East is that of the Mother and Son.

An elaborate priesthood sprang up around this religious cult making an expansive system. To this priesthood were entrusted the secret rituals that promised cleansing from sin and restoration to the favor of the gods.

This cleansing was bestowed by the sprinkling of special water. Tammuz was even said to have been killed by a wild beast but came back to life after 3 days; obviously a satanic counterfeit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Moses warned the Israelites against being seduced by the religious practices of the Canaanites.

The Canaanite religions were all just localized versions of the religion of Babylon.

The OT prophets repeatedly warned the people of God about being seduced by the counterfeit religion of Babylon.

Ezekiel protested the ceremony of weeping for Tammuz. (8:14)

Jeremiah decries the women of Israel making cakes for and burning incense to the Queen of heaven (7:18 44:17-25)

Zechariah summarizes the false religions with their secret rites of his day as a woman of great wickedness he calls Babylon. (5:1-11)

What's interesting is that we know historically, when the city of Babylon was destroyed, its religious system wasn't extinguished.

The religious center moved to the city of Pergamos – its chief priests and scholars relocated there and set up shop.

This gives us a new insight into Rev. 2: 12-13 where we read –

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is.” ’”

If you'll remember back to the letter to the Church at Pergamos – this was a warning about *compromise* – about listening to those false teachers who would convince the people of God to *accommodate* themselves to idolatry for the sake of avoiding persecution.

In Pergamos, the chief priests of the Babylonian cult wore crowns in the form of the head of a fish in honor of Dagon, the fish god.

These chief priests also bore the title of “*Keeper of the Bridge*” meaning the Bridge between satan and man in their united rebellion against God.

When Rome finally emerged as the capitol of the ancient world, the Babylonian priests packed up and moved again so they could be at the center of things and spread their influence throughout the world.

So ingrained did they become with the religion of Rome that the Emperor eventually became the chief priest – bearing the title

of *Pontifex Maximus*, Latin for *Keeper of the Bridge*.

When the Roman Empire crumbled and the Bishop of Rome became the designated head of what was left of the Empire, *HE* took the title – and maintains it to this day.

In fact, the early centuries of the Church are a sad story of how the simplicity of the teaching of the Apostles was corrupted and altered by men who were far more interested in political power than in being faithful to Christ.

They simply mashed Christianity together with Babylonialism.

Dave Hunt's book, *A Woman Rides the Beast* is an exhaustive study of the history of how the Babylonian counterfeit religion seduced and corrupted Christianity and how it will all come crashing down in the last days.

The point for us to see now is that the harlot John sees represents *all false religion* as it comes to its final expression in the Last Days. It began on the Plains of Shinar some 5000 years ago and has slowly and effectively filled the entire earth, giving rise to all kinds of error and evil.

Some Protestant commentators like to equate it with the Roman Catholic church because historically, that's what rose from the dregs of the Roman Empire.

But this harlot is FAR MORE than Romanism.

Rome may very well take the lead, but it includes and embraces all false religion;
Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Liberal Christianity, &
Humanism.

We'll come back to this later.

For now – notice how John describes her -

4The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.

She's clothed with the emblems of luxury.

Because *purple & red* dyes were rare and expensive, garments of these colors were reserved for the super-rich.

Red was especially reserved for elite rulers.

While many people wore jewelry in the ancient world, gold was

really only found on royalty, or those royalty wanted to favor. *Precious stones* and *pearls* were also signs of fantastic wealth and evidence of political power and favor.

In her hand is a *golden cup* – that’s a picture of opulent merriment and celebration.

But in the cup is vileness – evil and corrupt religious practices. In vs. 1 & 2, the angel gives us more information about the harlot –

¹Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, ²with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.”

V. 15 tells us what’s meant by the waters -

Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.

In other words – the harlot, who represents satan’s counterfeit religion holds sway over many people and nations.

Many of the world’s rulers are in cahoots with her.

She has propped them up and they have lent her power and credibility.

The result is that her evil influence has corrupted the religious and spiritual sensitivities of the entire world.

If you’ve every gone street-witnessing in a rough part of town – say Hollywood or downtown LA, you know how difficult it is to deal with a drunk.

Because they’re inebriated trying to reason with them is virtually impossible.

The same is true with the spiritual intoxication of spiritual error.

If you’ve every attempted to witness to a *religious* person, you know how *difficult* it is.

People who are disinterested in spiritual things tend to be far more open than those who think themselves to be religious and right.

Jesus had the hardest time with the religious experts – these gave Him the most grief.

This woman John sees represents all false religion as it will come to find expression in the Last Days Apostate Church.

It will be an organization that's in cahoots with the World and totally buddied up to the political structures of the day, just as the Church has been at points in history.

Donald Barnhouse wrote - "We find in the course of church history that one of the deadliest marks of ecclesiastical corruption is the lust for temporal power."

Finally, in describing her, John says in v. 6 –

6 I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

John's amazement is due to the fact that this harlot is drunk on the blood of the godly!

The persecution they endure doesn't come from pagan god-haters, as John was used to, but from a system that ostensibly looks godly.

The harlot is a *false-church*, one that is blood-thirsty for the saints. John Walvoord says, "False religion is always the worst enemy of true religion."

We should never forget that some of the most vicious persecution conducted against true Christians has been done in the name of the Church. [\[3\]](#)

In the days when the Roman Catholic Queen Mary ruled England (known as "Bloody Mary"), some 288 Christians were burnt at the stake for their stand for Christian truth.

The first of these martyrs was a man named John Rogers, who, as he stood chained to a stake, and the fire rose around him, up to his legs and shoulders, he rubbed his hands in the flames as if he were washing his hands in cold water.

Then he lifted his hands to the heavens and held them high until he was completely consumed by fire.

This barbarity was committed in the name of religion, in the name of the Church.

But Rogers went to the stake with such calm and dignity that the French Ambassador wrote that he went to his death "as if he

was walking to his wedding.”

His courage was so evident that the huge crowd burst into applause when they saw him walking to the stake.

Then John describes the beast the harlot rides -

8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

This one verse is an amalgamation of several previous references in Revelation.

At one point, it speaks of the devil.

At another it's the antichrist.

And then finally it's the political system he rules. "

We ought to understand it this way.

Satan has ever been seeking to gain control.

It started with his rebellion against God.

It moved to his gaining man's participation in the Garden of Eden.

It almost climaxed with Nimrod's rebellion in building Babel.

But it was dealt a serious set-back in the confusion of languages.

As history has progressed, the devil has been at work conspiring to gain control, control which he will finally accomplish through the career of the antichrist and the empire he rules.

The beast John sees is that last day's empire.

As we've seen previously, the empire the satan-possessed antichrist will rule is a reborn Roman Empire – the United States of Europe.

So here in v. 8 it's described as *having been*, now is *not*, but will ascend out of the abyss.

In Ch. 9. it's the *devil* who comes out of the abyss, and here's where we see the amalgamation of different images into one unifying symbol of evil.

It's the energizing influence of the devil that will bring Europe together as the power base of the antichrist.

The final element that will unite the world under the antichrist is the assassination attempt that is made on him.

He's killed and then rises back to life as is described in Ch. 13:3-4.

This is the beast the woman rides.

That she rides it means she directs & controls it; *at first!*
The angel now goes on to give more details about the beast -

9“Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. 10There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. 11The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.

Now – I know this sounds terribly complicated, but it's really not that difficult to sort out.

Mountains are used often in prophecy to refer to kingdoms and that is the way they are defined right here in v. 10.

The 7 heads of the beast represent 7 “mountains” or kingdoms.

5 of these kings and their kingdoms have passed away, 1 is, meaning was ruling when John wrote, and one more is to come.

But when it comes, it will only exist for a short time – to be overtaken by an 8th, who is distinct, and yet connect to the first 7.

Here's the best way to understand this -

In John's day, 5 major world empires had passed – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persian, and Greece.

These are mentioned in the visions of the OT prophets – most notably – Daniel.

The kingdom that ruled in John's time was Rome – that's the 6th.

The 7th which is to come will be the reborn Roman Empire, which will only exist for a short time before it is co-opted and taken over by the Last Days World Ruler, who establishes a new order, the 8th.

But this 8th king will be defeated by the Lord and will go in to *perdition* – ruin!

Now the angel describes the 7th kingdom that will morph into the 8th under the antichrist.

12“The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet,

They are that 7th kingdom that is yet to come in v. 10.

but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. ¹³These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those *who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.*”

So we see that it is during the reign of the 8th king that Jesus comes again.

15Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. ¹⁶And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. ¹⁷For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

The false religious system of Babylon will not ride the beast forever.

Rather the antichrist’s political system which she *begins* by riding, will eventually throw her off, trample her and then devour her.

Once the true believers are raptured, the only religious influence left on Earth will be that of the spiritually dead and counterfeit church and the pagan religions of the world.

Because the salt and light will be gone, religious apostasy and error will abound.

There will be quick moves to unite the world under one religious umbrella.

That movement is actually already well under way.

The *Earth Charter* is the product of a think tank led by Mikhail Gorbachev associated with the UN which is working toward a

One World System embracing Government, Religion, Law, and Economics.

They had a recent meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa in which they finalized many of their plans for implementing the Earth Charter.

The Preamble of the Earth Charter states:

... we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature.... Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations. "

According to the Charter, humanity must undergo a global "change of mind and heart." And the UN's all-wise seers visualize themselves as the lead change agents for this global undertaking.

According to Professor Steven Rockefeller, of the famous and wealthy Rockefeller family, the way to go about "building peace on earth" is through the "inclusive, integrated and spiritual approach" of the Earth Charter. Rockefeller described the Charter as an effort to incorporate the "wisdom of the world's religions."

The very next speaker following Rockefeller was Razeena Wagiet, the environmental adviser to South Africa's national minister of education. In her speech she said astrologers have foreseen that the world is about to enter a "Golden Age, a New Age."

This Earth Charter is no meaningless product of a bunch of fringe whackos.

This is the Constitution for a Global Government which *is* the aim of the UN.

We ought to find it intensely provocative as well to see the Vatican opening its doors to other religions.

The Pope has hosted several gatherings of the leaders of other

faiths.

In addressing a prayer gathering of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and others, Pope John Paul II told participants that their efforts were “unleashing profound spiritual energies in the world and bringing about a new climate of peace.”

The Pope pledged that the Catholic Church intends to “share in and promote” such ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation. “

The *Catholic Review* commented on this and said,

“The unity of religion promoted by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II and approved by His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not a goal to be achieved immediately, but a day may come when the love and compassion which both Buddha and Christ preached so eloquently will unite the world in a common effort to save humanity from senseless destruction, and leading to toward the light in which we all believe.”^[4] “

On some of the Pope’s trips he’s consented to and given the platform for pagan rituals.

Numerous liberal Protestant denominations have adopted paganism in many of their convention’s programs.

And even the *evangelical church* is being slowly corrupted and seduced by the errors of religious science – which is nothing but the old mysteries of Babylon sanitized and repackaged for the modern mind.

During the first half of the Tribulation, as the antichrist is slowly gaining influence and control over the *political machinery* of the European Union, the Apostate church will succeed in bringing the various faiths of the world together around one core set of spiritual beliefs.

The antichrist will see the value of *using* the Church as a means to his gaining control and influence, so he’ll allow the church to climb on board and take control of the political machinery.

Then, once the false church seemingly has things where she wants them, the antichrist will unmask His real plans, unseat the

church hierarchy and set himself up as the god all are to worship.

This will take place at the mid-point of the Tribulation.

18 And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

Here's one last comment from the angel on the identity of the harlot.

She is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.

In John's day, there was no doubt which city that was.

Rome was the political, economic, and religious center of the world.

But looked at from the *spiritual perspective*, Rome was just the contemporary manifestation of *Babylon*.

Rome may have conquered Babylon *militarily*, but Babylon had conquered Rome, and every other nation, socially, religiously economically, and in many other ways.

What Babylon began, every other capitol of Empire has only refined.

Rome was the most powerful and complete manifestation of the Spirit of Babylon ever seen.

When the antichrist rises to power, what City will be his capitol?

Some have suggested that it will be Rome, and that's a good guess.

Some officials in The European Union are calling for a standing capitol in Europe and Rome seems to be the premier choice.

Some have suggested that the antichrist's power center will be the ancient city of Babylon, which is being rebuilt by Saddam Hussein. ^^

There are OT prophecies which describe the Fall of Babylon, never to rise again.

And yet the ancient city has gone through a dramatic restoration.

So those prophecies must refer to a yet future destruction of Babylon.

Whatever city is meant here – it will be the headquarters of the last days world religion that will be Phase One of the antichrist's bid for global domination.

Once the Apostate Church has accomplished it's goal of securing

worship to the antichrist, He dispenses with it.
Those who've been a part of it to advance *their own agenda* will
be wiped out

CHAPTER 18

¹After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. ²And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! ³For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury."

We're going to go somewhat quicker now through ch. 18.

If ch. 17 was the judgment of the religious Babylon at the midpoint of the Tribulation, this is the judgment of the political and economic Babylon at the very end of the Tribulation.

It begins with John seeing another very powerful angel coming from heaven announcing the demise of Babylon the Great.

The time for its judgment has come, as is made clear by the double call – "Fallen-Fallen!"

This Babylon is so far gone, so corrupt it's become the dwelling place of all filth and spiritual evil.

This thing, whatever it is, though it makes merchants rich, is driven by the demonic.

And the moral and spiritual pollution it pumps out have infected and inebriated the entire world.

As we're going to see, *this* Babylon is the world's economic systems which have been united under the antichrist's control.

He's manipulated the world's markets in such a way as to add more wealth and power to his friends while taking it from the poor and innocent.

We'll look at this more closely in a bit.

4And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. **5**For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. **6**Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. **7**In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’ **8**Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong *is* the Lord God who judges her.

God makes the appeal to His people to not get caught up in the world’s system.

V. 4 was the basis of the sermon two Sundays ago.

This is spoken directly to those believers who will have managed to escape the persecution of the last days.

They mustn’t yield to the pressure to fit in to the antichrist’s system - even if he promises favor and rewards.

They must remain faithful to the Lord, because the world is about to be judged in a swift and terrible moment of judgment.

9“The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, **10**standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’

11“And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: **12**merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind

of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; ¹³and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. ¹⁴The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. ¹⁵The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, ¹⁶and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! ¹⁷For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance ¹⁸and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What *is* like this great city?'

19“They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’

The picture painted here is of a vast trading system that traffics in a multitude of goods and services.

There's four elements to this system:

- 1) A center of trade, called *Babylon*.
- 2) The vehicles and merchants of trade.
- 3) The goods traded.
- 4) The consumers who live luxuriously by them. ^^

What we see here is a *Capitalistic* system of awesome wealth and power.

But it all comes to a screeching halt in a moment of time when it's utterly destroyed by the hand of God.

God destroys it because like the religious Babylon of ch. 17, it's a corrupt system permeated by evil and wreaking havoc on men and women.

First of all – its spiritual motivation is demonic – v. 2

Second – it's become a false religious system in its own rite – V. 3

Materialism, consumerism is a religion.

It's the idea that the chief end of life is the accumulation of things.

Third – it's sins have reached to heaven – v. 5

Just as the tower of Babel was an attempt to reach to heaven, so this commercial tower has reached there.

Fourth – this system is based on unrestrained greed that's willing to break the law – v. 6

“Render to her, just as she rendered to you.”

The Greek word render (apodidomi) means “to pay a debt.”

God will give to commercial Babylon exactly what she deserves.

And what she deserves is made clear in the next phrase -

“Repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her.”

In Exodus 22:4-9, double restitution was the fine for theft.

This gives us a clue for how the last day's commercial system has made its wealth - through theft and corruption.

The relative freedom of trade, the luxury and bounteous wealth and privilege that at least some of the consumers enjoy, as well as the long list of goods traded, give the impression that this is a free-market system – capitalism realized – but there's a dark and dangerous problem with it.

It's driven by unrestrained greed, a greed so pervasive it leads eventually to it's own destruction.

I remember reading an essay some time ago how Capitalism and Biblical Christianity go together.

When the Bible becomes one's worldview, then capitalism is the inevitable result of the freedom and liberty we enjoy in Christ.

But if capitalism isn't checked by the Christian view of charity, honesty, and keeping the Lord first, then it becomes corrupted into an economic system that makes the rich richer at the expense of the poor.

Greed must be held in check by Christ, or the system will destroy itself.

The Founding Fathers knew this and saw it as applicable to not only economics but civil government as well.

One said, “Either man is ruled by the Bible or the bayonet.”

John Adams remarked that our Constitution was only for a Christian people; for a people who needed little external government because they were governed by the Spirit of God.

Alex De Tocqueville was a French sociologist and author who visited the United States in the 19th Century to discover the genius of the American experiment.

He said, “What makes America great is that she is good. If she ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.”

He said that he searched for the American secret of success in our halls of government, factories, schools, and public buildings but could not find it.

It remained a mystery until he visited our churches – and it was there he found the reason for America’s great prosperity and success.

Because we were a *spiritual* people, with morals based on our conviction that God is real and Righteous and one day we shall stand before Him – we could be free without the fear that freedom would turn into anarchy and chaos.

But this mindset, this worldview will be stripped from the earth during the Tribulation and all that will be left is a demonically inspired lust for luxury and materialism that will not only consume goods, but make merchandise of the souls of people –

Look at v. 13 – in the list of goods traded we find -

13 and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men.

People, the weak, poor, and disenfranchised will be used as sport, entertainment, and who knows what else.

We decry the barbarism of the gladiatorial combats in Rome – but we’re not far from it in some of the extreme sports of today.

And pornography is absolutely exploding! What is that but a the buying and selling of the bodies and souls of men and women?

And what about the abortion industry?

More than likely, what we are seeing here is the final manipulation of

the world's markets under the control of the antichrist.

As he has secured all banking and marketing through the mark, he then promises material wealth and luxury to those who join His system.

In fact, he increases the wealth of those he wants in power and steals from those whom he wants to destroy.

But there comes a point at which God says – “That’s enough” and rains down His judgment on it and wipes it out.

How this judgment come isn’t made clear – but it’s swift, dramatic, and complete -

20“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and *you* holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!”

21Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw *it* into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. **22**The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. **23**The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.

This mention of the millstone reminds us of what Jesus said in Matthew 18:6-

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

The world system represented by Babylon in Revelation 18 is worthy of the awesome judgment of God because she has seduced the entire human race to sin.

She has enticed, cajoled, seduce, manipulated, and even used fear, intimidation, peer-pressure, threats, and at times the weight of

law to encourage people to sin.
It is a terrible thing to sin yourself; it is even more terrible to lead others into sin.

And God is going to judge it! ^^

John is meant to understand that the last day's commercial and economic system is going to be dealt a final, devastating blow from which it will not recover.

In vs. 9-10 the kings of the Earth lament the destruction of the commercial world-system.

Of course they do – it's propped them up, been their support and gained them power.

But it says they stand at a distance, for fear of her torment coming on them.

In other words, the destruction will be so complete and hot, they have to keep their distance!

In vs. 11 & 15, the same thing is said of the merchants and traders who've trafficked in the luxurious goods of Babylon.

They mourn over the loss of their wealth, but they won't go near for fear of her torment coming on them.

They just stand at a distance and watch as the smoke of her ruin rises skyward.

It seems clear from this that *however* God judges Babylon, it's something specific, violent, and quick.

It involves fire and burning, for those are the terms used here.

Just as religious Babylon will likely be headquartered in some city, whether it be Rome, Babylon, or some other city, so the last day's commercial and political system will probably be centered in a city as well.

On 9/11/2001, two jet liners smashed in to the twin towers of the World Trade Center, and within an hour, they cam crashing down.

Now, that was NOT the fulfillment of what we're reading here – but it does give us a graphic example of hour judgment can come on an economic center in just a short time.

Today, there are several economic centers around the world; New York, London, Zurich, Singapore, and so on.

In the Tribulation, because the antichrist seeks for world domination, he will likely centralize all banking and economic control in his capitol.

More than likely, it is this that we see judged here.
When and how this takes place we'll see in our study in Rev. 19.

**24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints,
and of all who were slain on the earth.”**

This ought to settle it for us that ultimately what Babylon stands for is larger than just one city – it's the whole world system that stands opposed to God and is hostile to His people.

CONCLUSION

Let's end by looking again at v. 5 –

For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

Judgment falls on Babylon because her sins have reached to heaven and God has called to mind ALL of her iniquities.

Contrast that with this -

Psalm 32:1-2

1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit. ”

Jeremiah 31:34 • I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

Psalm 103:11-12

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;

12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

God remembers and inventories the world's sin but He forgives and forgets the sin of those who believe in His Son.

Tonight – we must make a distinction – are we of God or the world?
Where's our home, Babylon or Heaven?

What's our treasure – Peace, love and joy in the Holy Spirit or this

world's goodies?

As things heat up and we move ever closer to the Tribulation, each of us needs to come to grips with what grips our affection – The World or God.

[1] Johnson, Alan *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pg. 556 • Jeremiah 3:3

[2] Walvoord, John, *The revelation of Jesus Christ* pg. 246

[3] Guzik, David, *Online Commentary*

[4] Guzik